**Easter Teaching**

April 17, 2022

Text: John 20: 1-18

On the first day of the week, Mary of Magdala came to the tomb early in the morning, while it was still dark, and saw the stone removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and told them, “They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don’t know where they put him.”

So Peter and the other disciple went out and came to the tomb. They both ran, but the other disciple ran faster than Peter and arrived at the tomb first; he bent down and saw the burial cloths there, but did not go in. When Simon Peter arrived after him, he went into the tomb and saw the burial cloths there, and the cloth that had covered his head, not with the burial cloths but rolled up in a separate place. Then the other disciple also went in, the one who had arrived at the tomb first, and he saw and believed. For they did not yet understand the Scripture that he had to rise from the dead. Then the disciple es returned home.

But Mary stayed outside the tomb weeping. And as she wept, she bent over into the tomb and saw two angels in white sitting there, one at the head and one at the feet where the body of Jesus had been.

And they said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken my Lord, and I don’t know where they laid him.”

When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus there, but did not know it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?” She thought it was the gardener and said to him, “Sir, if you carried him away, tell me where you laid him, and I will take him.”

Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabbouni,” which means Teacher.

Jesus said to her, “Stop holding on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am going to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”

Mary of Magdala went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord,” and what he told her.

Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!

As I was preparing for today’s teaching I did as I often do, and sat with the scriptures and saw how they moved me. Yet each time I sat down with these scripture passages I felt this resistance, a whisper of “not yet!’ in my heart and mind. I felt a longing to make space for this holy week, the Passion, and particularly Holy Saturday before sinking into Easter.

Several of you know I’ve been training to accompany people through the spiritual exercises of Saint Ignatius. The spiritual exercises, for those of you who are unfamiliar with them, is the opportunity to walk with Jesus throughout his life using scripture and imaginative prayer, typically within the context of either a 30-day silent retreat or in daily life over the course of nine months. An invitation that I love deeply is to allow space for Holy Saturday, that liminal space between the grief of Good Friday and the jubilation of Easter Sunday. This can be incredibly challenging. For one, we’re over two thousand years removed from his death. We have only ever experienced Good Friday in conjunction with Easter. Not to mention how tempting it can be to skip past the discomfort of death. But imagine those first disciples. Perhaps easier to imagine is the death of a close friend, the way in which we grieve not imagining to see them in the flesh again. Missing their smells, particular noises, touch.

The invitation within the spiritual exercises is to wait. Wait. Wait for the signs of the Easter light. Notice for the shift in your heart, in your surroundings, that something has changed. Eighth Day, I’ve noticed ways in which we as a community have stayed in the discomfort of the liminal space this Lent. I think about the Marja’s sharing within her teaching last week of felt sense of darkness, I think about our vulnerability in sharing our gifts both at Community Day and in our collective sharing after hearing Gordon’s words from “Calling Forth from Charisma,” in people deeply engaging with the Lenten readings during Ignatian contemplation on Thursdays, in the labor pains of moving back to in-person/hybrid worship, in struggling honestly with the leadership structure of the council, what could a payment policy look like for Eighth Day. All of these personal and communal ways we have chosen to stay, wait and watch for the light.

Now this waiting hasn’t been passive. It’s an active choice to keep turning to God, turning to love, turning to the beloved within each of us, choosing not to run away.

And then, the light! I personally felt this shift this week in a very literal way. As I opened all the windows of the house and felt the breeze almost sweep the sunshine through our home this week. A physical warmth in my body I didn’t realize I had missed. A sense of new life breathing and moving through me. (And I don’t just mean the hiccups and swift kicks I feel in my womb each day).

And so, Eighth Day, now that we have stayed with Jesus through Passion, through Holy Saturday, where can we see the Easter light dawning?

Can you notice something in your own life shifting towards new life? Can you see it for our little community?

Something new for me this Easter is a new appreciation for our gospel passage today. Through the same training program I mentioned before in the spiritual exercises, I’ve gotten the opportunity to dive a little deeper into the bigger context of the scriptures. I’ve always loved that the women were the first to encounter the empty tomb and risen Jesus. It brings to mind Alice’s teaching on the powerful women in our history.

There are different criterion that biblical scholars use to determine the plausibility of whether or not an event in scripture was historical i.e. “Actually happened.” Now, I’ve never been very interested in this because I think what is most important is how we are moved right now: Is it moving us towards God, towards love. But what is beautiful about this criterion is that biblical scholars posit that because it would have been so unusual and potentially embarrassing to admit the role of women in this important moment, it actually confirms it’s viability. God used the “weakness” of Mary Magdalene’s societal position and flipped it, resurrected it, to be a place of power and agency. Incredible!

Now back from my little nerdy tangent…

I want us to sit for a moment with Mary of Magdala. Imagine the level of intimacy shared with a soul friend that you’ve walked alongside, encouraged, laughed with, argued with, eaten with, hoped in, witnessed and stayed by his side during death, prepared his body for burial, and come back to the tomb? There are so few people we hold this level of intimacy with throughout our lifetime. But yet, you know what I mean. Perhaps in a sibling, a dear friend, a life partner, or even simply the longing for that intimacy.

 Now imagine finding that person’s tomb empty, terrified and upset that they’ve stolen his body. [pause]

Now imagine hearing that beloved person speak your name.

Nothing would sound so familiar. Really stop for a minute and listen to your name spoken in that unmistakable voice.

[Reads first names of everyone in room and on Zoom outloud]

What would you feel? What would you think? Let it affect you for a moment.

Imagine God speaking to you in that all-familiar voice, speaking your name, waking up and resurrecting something within you and around you that you took as dead.

That is the resurrection we are invited to believe in, Eighth Day. Can we believe that resurrection is possible? Can we dare to hope in that new creation? Our name comes out of that belief in the eighth day of creation. God co-creating in and through us. Bringing new life we couldn’t have imagined. This absolutely shapes how we live each moment of each day. If we believe in a God that transforms death to new and abundant and extravagant life, how then are we called to live? What barriers would begin to melt away with the grounding truth that we are deeply loved by a God who’s voice we can unmistakably recognize, who desires to bring us to new life?

And so, my Eighth Day family, let us live into that Easter hope, faith and love, that Easter vibrance, even! That God is present with us through the seasons of Lent, the time of waiting in the Holy Saturdays, and in the resurrection joy.