

Sunday, March 31, 2013

Easter Sunday

It begins with silence and darkness, with Mary facing the daily reality of having someone you love dead. Mary comes to the tomb, to mourn, to weep and to bear witness to the loss that filled her heart. And when everything seems already so wrong, it begins to even seem worse. The stone has been removed. They have even stooped to steal his body, to rob them even of a place to remember.

This is how Easter begins, it begins with our human reality of death, with the inevitable suffering of pain and loss that does and will fill each of our lives in time. Easter is not about some sort of escape, so it begins by having us look at reality. What a profound metaphor the empty tomb at first express, like an empty chair, an empty conversation, an empty celebration.

So Mary runs to tell them. She runs to get Peter and John. The pace has now changed, Soon Peter is running and John is out running him, only to be stopped by the reality of an empty tomb, unable to go in, perhaps because he is afraid of robbers, or ghosts or perhaps he sense some new reality he is afraid to yet enter. But not Peter, Peter, true to form doesn't let anything stop him, and he barrels right past John, right into the open tomb and right into a reality no one yet understands. The light though begins to dawn. John, even though he can't understand it, even though he can't understand what has happened or what it means, he begins to believe, he begins to have faith.

Peter and John leave. They leave Mary, still weeping by herself outside the tomb. It is Mary, the one who stays with her grief, who is too

overwhelmed by grief, that looks in and through her tears, sees angels and then a gardener. But her own grief, the unbeliability of the situations keeps her from seeing what is before her. So Jesus calls her by name. And it is the weeping Mary; that the fullness of this reality breaks in upon. Mary, this woman whom even centuries of Christianity has looked down upon. Mary, this woman who has known sorrow and suffering. It is for Mary that the resurrected Jesus is first revealed to and it is her tears that are transformed so that it is Mary who is sent, as the Apostle to the Apostles to begin the telling of the most remarkable, story yet told.

On Maundy Thursday, Jesus taught us that at the heart of everything, at the heart of God and at the heart of our lives is love. Then Jesus showed us what love means, by becoming a servant who washed his disciples' feet. Then he went out, and entered fully into our suffering, he became living compassion, a word which means to suffer with. And he did not just suffer with, but he took our suffering, our sin, our guilt, our hopelessness and our death, death the thing which in the end defines all of our lives. All of this, in Jesus, was taken in to God until God was dead. The story of Holy week, up to this point has not been some sort of escape, rather it has been a story that has look squarely at what life is about, it is intended to be about love, but it is so often marked with suffering. Like Mary, it is a story that brings us to the tomb, so that we may fully encounter our tombs, face them and be left weeping.

But it is precisely at this point, on Easter day, that we discover something miraculous, Jesus is not dead, God is alive. In this resurrection something new has been opened, we have discovered God's ability to transform suffering. By Jesus' resurrection suddenly we can see that death

is not the end, but rather a new beginning and if death is not the end then you and I, our lives are a part of something more, with death defeated suffering, is still a part of life, but it can no longer define the totality of what life is about, after all there is life after suffering, there is life free from suffering, and sin, if the worst sin imaginable, the actual killing of God did not condemn us, then Sin, in all of its forms no longer has the power to condemn. Suddenly in God's weakness, in God becoming a weak human, in God's death, God's power through weakness, to transform, has been revealed.

So how do we respond? What does this mean for us? Some are gifted to be like Peter. Some can simply just barrel into this new reality, they might not understand it, they might not have fully experienced what this is all about, but nothing, not even an open grave seems to stop them. Others are gifted like John. This is a reality that is hard to enter, it is frightening to enter, and so they stand back, they are cautious, but even in their caution, even in their hesitation and lack of understanding, slowly the gift of faith dawns. Today I want us to focus on the gift of Mary. For it is Mary who is caught in the reality of life, who is caught in sorrow, caught in loss, caught in the fullness of the reality and pain of being human. It is Mary who chooses not to run from it, but rather to go to the tomb, to weep before it, and stay weeping when all others have left. It is Mary who shows us the gift that comes when we fully enter and face our sorrow, and it is in this, that Jesus comes, even when we don't recognize him, to call us by name, to transform our tears, until we are ready to be sent to tell others what we have learned and seen *through* our tears.

Mary does not have to tell her tale alone. Jesus will also bear witness to the message that she will bring. Again and again it is in the Apostles brokenness and doubt that Jesus appears. He appears when they are hiding behind locked doors. He appears to Thomas in his doubt; he appears as the disciples flee away from Jerusalem and when they abandon their calling to go back to fishing. Just as Jesus was crucified on the cross, at the lowest point humanity can go, Jesus keeps showing up, the good news of the resurrection is made real, when the disciples are at their worst. It is then from this low point, they are transformed, it is from their mourning, their fear, their suffering and doubts are transformed into dancing and mission and a hope that doesn't even fear death.

This same good news is for us as well. Easter was a point long ago, when God in Jesus opened for us the way of eternal life. Easter is also today, Easter is actually what we celebrate every Sunday. Because this process of eternal life is still unfolding. I wrote this sermon, sitting at my Dad's desk back in Camrose. I was back to be with my Mom and brother for the anniversary of my Dad's death this past week. His desk was largely as he had left it, with photos of the people and places he loved still around it, even the calendar was still turned to April of last year, except now it had photos gathered for his funeral. Now it was my computer and not his that sat on its surface. His desk sat, kind of like a tomb reminding me of how in midst of our days death is interwoven into life.

As I wrote this sermon I also remember what it was like when he died, I remember as he died feeling of the veil between this life and eternal life becoming so thin, I remember the peace that passes all understanding that we felt, even though the struggles of death, and the struggles that are left for

those still living. I remember the compassion of God being experienced through caring people. There is a tomb, but in the midst of it God appeared, God's gift of eternal life was revealed. Tears may still come, but they are now mixed with thanksgiving.

Easter comes like Mary, it comes telling us of a story that seems so hard to believe, still it comes with an invitation to come and see, the tomb, and our tombs are open. Now some can barrel in like Peter, some like John cannot understand nor go in, but still they begin to believe. Let us also see the gift of Mary, the gift of weeping, of facing fully the pain and suffering on our lives, not so that we can dwell in this, but rather so that in the midst of this we can hear Jesus call our name, and we can hear the good news that transforms our suffering. Death has been defeated, Sin no longer condemns, eternal life to us has been given. For Jesus our Lord is Risen, Christ is Risen, . . . He is risen indeed.

Amen