

THREATENED WITH RESURRECTION

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Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church

Easter Sunday

Based on Mark 1:1-8 (translation below). Three women struggle with an empty tomb.

Oh, dear.

This really is not what we were expecting.

We have become so used to the way the Gospel of John tells the story on Easter Sunday, with an entirely enthusiastic reunion and a gardener to set us free in lily-white dresses and blue satin sashes.

Not this mid-sentence let-down according to the Gospel of Mark: our key witnesses over-laden with unused ointment, tongue-tied in terror, an alleluia stuck in their throats, replaced with something that sounds more like a resounding, "aaaaaaaaaaaa ..?"

Even most translators cannot handle the non-ending of Mark's Gospel. They have to tidy it up when they turn it into English.

But the truth is in the actual Greek the story does end mid-sentence: Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome – having experienced an opportunity for transformation on the other side of trauma – here at the empty tomb "mention nothing to no one, fear-filled for ... "

They are threatened with resurrection, these two Marys and a Salome. Trembling in between hope and despair where things just are not making a whole lot of sense ...

It is worth remembering, to be fair, that these women have seen it *all*.

They have birthed and they have bled and they have fed and they have bathed their young, like good Jewish women of northern Galilee. Like Julia Esquivel and the indigenous Guatemalan women of our reading for today.

It is worth remembering, to be fair, that Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Salome have scrubbed the scales of the fish from the sea until they had no more scales to scrub, working their fingers to the bone.

They have figured out ways to make ends meet they were certain were not *ever* going to meet.

And they have buried their old, and far-too often they have buried their young. And they have seen the cross a thousand times.

And yes, these three women were *there* when they crucified our Lord ...

And the thing is, they can *handle* all of that!

Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, Salome, they know all too well the fragile thread that runs through human existence. That fragile thread you and I have come to know all too closely through the crisis of COVID.

Death is nothing new to these women. Doubt is nothing new to them. Crucifixion is nothing new to them.

And they have figured out a way, in their own way, to *handle* all of that!

The same way you and I have figured out a way, in our own way, one full year into global pandemic, how to *handle* all of that.

It is the *other* side of that cross that brings these women to their knees. This “nothing” that is a profound *something* by its very nothingness ...

Which is that *He is not here! He has been raised, as he said!*

Which means that how they have been “handling all of that” – how you and I have been “handling all that” – is now radically undone!

It does not need to be “handled” at all!

We are threatened with resurrection, here at the empty tomb. Caught up in the earthquake Julia Esquivel describes that is shaking the world and putting everything in its place. Caught up in the call to bear “the courage necessary to arrive at the goal which lies beyond death.” Caught up in the call to “heal that wound of the fallen.” Caught up in the call to keep passing the torch in this marvelous marathon relay of Hope.

We are threatened with resurrection, here at the empty tomb, because Jesus has gone right on back to work in Galilee! Where the ministry of justice and peace, where the unfolding reign of God, on earth as it is in heaven, began in the first place!

We are threatened with resurrection, here at the empty tomb, because Jesus has gone right on back to preparing a place for us to follow. And by God, the young servant says to anyone who will listen, if you know what is good for you, you will get right on out of whatever tomb your cross has put you in and get right back to work with him!

Because God is not done with Jesus yet. And God is not done with you yet. And God is not done with me yet. Alleluia! Amen!

But can we just admit the *threat* of resurrection for a minute?

Can we just admit that Jesus knows how we too easily entomb within the holy temple of our bodies a burning rage or despair or sadness over whatever cross we have borne. Or guilt. Or vengeance.

Tell the truth! We all do it!

That tomb of terror sits right here, where the compassionate heart of God is supposed to be beating with joy within us.

It happens to us all.

Can we just admit we might very well be more threatened by the thought of God emptying that tomb that dwells within us than we are by the cross that put it there in the first place?

Because that tomb makes *sense* to us. We have oil and spices to lay on those bitter wounds. We have figured out how to “handle” it.

And yet ...

Here we are on an Easter Sunday morning one year into a global pandemic. With two Marys and a Salome. And the stone on that tomb that has encroached itself around the beating heart of God within us has been rolled away, with no effort on our part.

And what do we find instead ..?

That the beating breathing boundless body of Christ bids us back to that life-giving Lake of Galilee – wherever that lake may be in your life and in mine – to resurrect together his ministry of justice and peace and healing and wholeness. To resurrect together the very reign of God on earth as it is in heaven.

And *grace*, in the end. And grace ...

Which is what the ministry of Jesus has always been about. And a little thing like a crucifixion is not going to get in the way of that.

“There is no bad from which good cannot come,” says the beautiful Spanish proverb translated into English.

No hay mal que por bien no venga.

There is no bad from which good cannot come. Not even a global pandemic.

So whoever you are, from wherever you have come, whatever you have done, whatever you have left undone, whatever has been done to you – even when you deny the very image of God in your midst, out of fear, like Peter did – the empty tomb is for you! The ministry continues for you! The alleluia has been shouted for you! The new life begins with you!

And, dear friends at Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church and beyond, on this Easter Sunday Two Thousand Twenty One, it is time to get back to work!

Maybe not (yet) in our beloved sanctuary. Maybe not (yet) in groups larger than just a few. Or forty! Spread out and double masked, as we had in our Easter Sunrise Service. But absolutely in a common spirit of radical hospitality, holistic spirituality, and engaged compassion. Which was never, in the end, confined to a building. Just like the ministry of Jesus was never, in the end, confined to just himself.

Dear friends at Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church and beyond, on this Easter Sunday Two Thousand Twenty One, it is time to shake off the depths of pandemic despair. Even when lingering trauma and displacement overpower us. And put our faith where our mouth is.

Even if we are threatened with resurrection, like Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Salome, it is time to finish the incomplete ending from the Gospel according to Mark. To perceive the blessing unfolding before us. And to go. And to *tell!*

Let the church say, “Amen!”

Mark 16: 1 – 8

*As the sabbath concludes,
Mary Magdalene
and Mary the mother of James,
and Salome,
search the marketplace for aromatic oils
in order to complete the burial ritual for Jesus.*

*At dawn,
Day One of the New Sabbath,
they stumble upon the tomb,
as the sun comes up.*

*They had been saying to each other,
“Who will roll away for us the stone that seals the tomb?”*

*Lo and behold,
they begin to perceive a blessing:
the stone is rolled away!*

*Transported into that place of death,
Mary Magdalene and
Mary the mother of James,
and Salome
perceive a young servant –
wrapped in the robe of a martyr –
now sitting in a place of honor.*

This is mind-blowing!

*But the young servant calls out to them,
“Don’t freak out!
You are seeking
– with good reason –
a version of the Nazarene named Jesus
whose power has been destroyed.*

But he has aroused a movement for life!

“Just not here.

“Behold the place he was cast aside!

*“Depart from this place at the center of power.
Tell the disciples of Jesus
– even Peter (who denied him) –
‘Jesus is leading you back to the margins*

in Galilee.

*That is where he will let you see him,
as he tried to explain to you."*

*Without delay,
Mary Magdalene,
Mary the mother of James,
and Salome
shake off the depths of despair.*

*But just as quickly,
trauma and displacement overpower them again.*

*So they mention nothing to no one,
fear-filled for ...*