

Easter Sunday 2021
Mark 16: 1-8
Facing the Fire
The Rt. Rev. Dr. Bonnie A. Perry
April 4, 2021

May the God...

Blessed Morning, Friends. Blessed Morning.

As the sun, came up, on the first day of the week they went to his tomb: Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome. They wondered, who would roll the stone, for it was very large? But such details did not derail them. They needed to go, to wash his battered body to honor him and to remember who he had been for them. They'd borne witness to his pain and last breaths on Friday. They had been there when his apostles scattered and hid.

Now they go, to do, this one last witness.

When they arrive, the stone is rolled. They venture inside, temporarily sightless as they move from the rising sun to the shadow-filled cave. As their eyes adjust and vision returns, instead of seeing his shrouded body, they see an engaging young man, whose presence in the tomb scares the hell out of them.

He tries to calm them, soothingly invites them not to be alarmed and before they can think anymore, he points out, what their eyes have yet to communicate to their brains, Jesus' body is gone.

The young man simply says as he points to the empty space, "You're looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified, He has been raised. Tell Peter, and his disciples he is going ahead to Galilee. You will see him there, just as he told you."

What then do these brave women do? Filled with terror and amazement, they run away and say nothing to anyone—(Oh I remember the first time I read that line, I just didn't see it coming. Is that it—does the story just fall off of a cliff?)

I imagine after they left the tomb, the angel's words continued to echo in their ears and roll around in their hearts, "He is raised, he has gone ahead of you to Galilee..." I imagine somehow, individually or together they made their way to Galilee. How could they not go and see....is He here?

That Sunday morning is not what they hoped for, not what they expected. The change they thought he would bring has not happened: Rome still rules, the poor long for food, the rich hold sway, the people are divided, nothing they'd hoped for has changed.

And his body is gone. They cannot even say goodbye. Or could it be? Something much more than they imagined, more than they ever knew, could it be that everything is remade? Is he alive?

Friends, we are in a similar state. Our country seems to be broken in two, a polarized fireball of dissent and distress. This is not the change for which we have longed. How easy it would be for us to hide? To put our heads down and wish the virus away, ignore the racial dis-ease and see if it spontaneously fixes itself, or hide ourselves from the world with the mistaken belief that the animosity in our country will vanish. We could do just that. Look away and say it is an overwhelming lost cause well beyond our powers.

I saw something a spectacle that has stayed with me—on Netflix of all places: Formula 1: Drive to Survive.

The bravado is gone, the bravery is faded, a \$14 million dollar Formula 1 racecar, is split in two: the back half by the side of the racetrack, the front half partway through a steel barrier swallowed in a ball of flames, the motionless driver is trapped inside.

The driver Romain Grosjean, has crashed at the start of the first lap in the Bahrain Grand Prix, he crashed while going 150 mph flipped, skidded, flipped again and hit the barrier with the force of 67g's. The back portion of the car is on fire, but recognizable. The front half, you cannot see, the flames shooting from where we presume it to be are 10 to 15ft high.

Two safety cars, European station wagons make their way to the crash. The car has been burning for 11 seconds. Three guys jump out, two with hand held fire extinguishers. This is it. That's all that gets sent.

The fire is fueled by a leak in the gas tank, the flames grow taller, the time passes by, it will soon explode. The rescue team struggles to get closer, tries to get the blast of the extinguisher anywhere near the flames. The heat is a furnace. They back away again. Time passes. The commentators begin to wonder how Grosjean could ever survive. Head first into a barrier, car split in two, engulfed in flames. People begin to turn away. They cover their eyes and hold onto those nearby. More time passes, precious seconds, the heat rises. His wife watches on TV. The TV cameras cut away. There is no word. The rescue guys creep a bit closer, the flames subside in one place and grow in another.

There is no hope. I am aghast that Netflix is filming this. Death is not a show. Time continues to pass. The other drivers slow their cars to a stop.

Netflix cuts to the physician who was on the scene. He recounts in horror what he saw: the flames, a brief glimpse of Grosjean's inert body, the people with fire extinguishers trying, making small bits of progress.

Then he says, he sees Grosjean's hand move. He tells the fire extinguishers to get closer. They do. Grosjean's head twists, he moves up, then falls back down. Grosjean's hands come back up—then his shoulder and then a jerk and his body is above the protective halo of the car's structure, fire surrounding him.

Grosjean crawls out, the doctor grabs his shoulder and pulls. Grosjean's racing suit is on fire, the fire extinguishers are turned on him.

The doctor tends to him. Two minutes and forty five seconds later his wife, thinking he is dead, burned alive, watches him walk slowly across the track to the ambulance. The next day in an interview he says, "I was stuck, I had accepted the reality that I would die, but then the thought of my children came to me and decided I needed to do more and try harder. I could not give up."

Friends, our world bears a strong resemblance to that formula 1 racecar, split in half plagued with flames, seemingly a fatal, hopeless, tragic mess. And we, here we are wondering do we run from the fire, and hide or do we risk going to Galilee to see?

And if Jesus' story ended on Good Friday, it would make perfect sense to turn from the ball of fire, and hide our eyes from the pain of this world.

But Jesus' story, God's story didn't end that day. He suffered, died and was buried. And on the third day the tomb was empty, his body gone, the women turn in terror and leave. But we are all here, even in weird pandemic land, we are here virtually together so one of those women overcame her fear said something to somebody. They must have made their way to Galilee to see, what they never ever could have imagined to believe.

And so I wonder might we? Might we not hide our eyes from the pain all around. Might we face the burning car with who we are and what we have, even if it is just our lame hand-held fire extinguishers. Might we go to Galilee, with our care, compassion, with reckless, hope-fueled abandon? Doing more than we can imagine because the tomb was empty, his body was gone and Resurrection means there is always something more. Resurrection means there is always something more. So, in spite of our ineptness, giving no mind to our fears, may we follow the angels directive and know in our souls that story is not over, for no power, no principality, no height, nor depth, no virus, no lie or system of hate for separate us from the Love of Christ Jesus.

His body is gone. He has been raised. He is alive. Christ is Risen, The Lord is Risen Indeed. Alleluia.