

John 20: 1-18
Let us Leave the Tomb
Easter Sunday 2022
The Rt. Rev. Dr. Bonnie A. Perry
April 17, 2022

Come Holy Spirit...

Good Morning!

Early on the first day of the week, while it is still dark. She, who is mentioned more than any other person in John's Gospel, she, Mary Magdalene, goes to the tomb. She goes alone, to cry, to sob at the place where she knows his battered, broken, dead body lies. She goes alone to say 'goodbye' one last time.

I suspect that there isn't one of us here today, who hasn't in the last two years at one time or another found ourselves completely overwhelmed with sobs and fears. We know about being overwhelmed at work, or losing our jobs, we understand being afraid and worried about our health. Worrying about relatives, friends, and the increasingly dire state of our world. We've endured weeks and months of feeling cut off and being alone. On many a day, I know for me, I was simply too afraid and too darn sad to hope. The tomb, the grave, for many of us feels almost kind of familiar. We know why Mary Magdalene went there; we've even reserved a space for her.

But when she arrives, even in the dark she can see that the stone that sealed the tomb, has been rolled. Insult, injury, her beloved friend even in his death is betrayed. Someone has messed with his tomb and taken his body.

She runs to the disciples. Come, see, the insanity continues, the rock is rolled, they've taken his body. Two of the disciples run to see. The beloved disciple arriving first. Simon Peter second. Peter goes in first. In the gloom of the tomb, his eyes eventually adjust, and he sees the burial shrouds but not his battered body. The beloved disciple crowds in behind Peter. He too sees the linens on the floor. Each man leaves.

Mary stays, at the grave, outside his tomb. She stays, crying. Crying in that way we do, when we know in our souls that someone we love is gone. That feeling, the palpable absence of their presence, leaves us hollowed out and cold.

You know what I mean, don't you? All who we have lost these past two years.

Then she moves into the cave. Looking for that place where his body last lay. And there inexplicably, next to either end of the discarded shroud are two men dressed in white. She can see them clearly even in the dim light.

"Why, woman are you crying?"

This is how it goes? Odd men, stupid questions...

She offers them her truth, "They have taken his body. And I know not where."

Then she backs out, turns around, walking right into a man, who must be the gardener.

To him she asks, what she is asking everyone, "Where have you taken his body? I will go and get him. Please just tell me." Her need to physically touch him, transcends everything else.

Then he says....he says her name, "Mary."

"Mary."

He calls her by name.

Then she too knows. She hears. She sees. She recognizes. He is alive.

"My teacher." You, Oh my Lord, you are here. You are alive.

Then she does what we all would do, she grabs hold of him, clings to him. She grabs him tight. She is at the tomb and everything is shifting and like the apostles Peter, James and John on the mt of transfiguration, she wants to stay there. Stay in that place at his grave, moored in that moment holding on to him who has come back to her.

But he, Jesus, the Son of God, who is crucified, and died, and now risen, cannot be contained, he cannot be limited to the grave. Resurrection is not static, it demands action.

"No—Mary. Do not hold onto me, for my work is not done. And your work has just, just begun. I must go to my father and your father, to my God and your God. And you, you must go and tell the rest."

What we know about Easter, as theologian Marcus Borg says, is that Jesus lives. Jesus lives not just as a transformative historical figure, but in the present, here and now. And in the midst of all that we have been through these last two years that seem far more like a decade, his presence, his reality means that we are not in any of this alone. He is alive and with us as we wrestle with our doubts, struggle with our weaknesses and fear for the future of our world. He is alive and he is here.

Because of that

Neither you nor I can stay at this tomb. Up from the grave he arose: Resurrection means leaving the tomb. It means facing our lives, in spite of all that is happening with resurrection hope: going, praying, asking, acting, together.

Friends

We have a uniquely American way of dying, death through guns. Most will say that there is little we can do to change this. Little to do to stop death by suicide, or death because a heated argument gone awry. Little we can do because our legislature is held hostage by the NRA and gun manufacturers, but still more than 120 of us this past week converged on Lansing to speak with our legislators and say, we are not content to stay at the tomb and mourn the dead. We demand they no longer accept, dead children, dead women, dead men as the price for doing business. We who are people of faith, Christians cannot be content

with the graves of status quo. We, like Mary will leave the grave, and declare life, demand life. He is alive and so we work for something more.

We who watch in horror as the people of Ukraine battle for their lives against a superpower fueled by a fanciful retelling of history and an unchecked narcissistic leader, we will not simply remain at the tomb, but will pray by acting, join with me in raising tens of thousands of dollars to assist all who are affected by this war. Episcopal Relief and Development is on the front lines caring for people and we can assist them. Our diocese is giving \$50,000 a thousand dollars for every day of Easter to aid the refugees of Ukraine and I today, commit \$1,000 of my own. Join me. Let us raise \$100,000 and offer hope. We cannot stay at the tomb.

As we see another black man, Patrick Lyoya, executed during a traffic stop in Grand Rapids, friends, we will pray and lament and we will not acquiesce to despair, nor will we jump at trite solutions. Instead let us be the people who trace the actions that brought the police officer and Patrick Lyoya to his tomb of death. Let us trace and name the policies and beliefs that keep causing black men to be killed.

If we are white, let us name our ignorance, our complicity, our lack of action in the past, and now this Easter morning let us go forth from this tomb with our sisters and brothers of color and right this wrong, and end these days of death. Let us hope and work for more. Resurrection comes day by day and morning by morning.

Resurrection means having the faith and the stamina to carry on relinquishing death, and insisting on life. As Episcopal priest and theologian Kelly Brown Douglas says.

“[This] is not a one-time journey. Hope is something that... takes work.... hope is always an active thing, as the resurrection is an active thing. It require[s]d people to move and to go ... to recommit themselves to the ministry of Jesus.”

We cannot stay at the grave.

Why are you weeping? He is alive. He calls us by name. He will not let us stay at the tomb, “You cannot hold me, you must now go and tell them.” He is alive. We cannot settle for death.

Resurrection means there is always something more.

Alleluia Christ is risen, the Lord is Risen indeed. Alleluia.