

Easter Sunday 2023  
 Matthew 28: 1-10  
 The Rt. Rev. Dr. Bonnie A. Perry

Good Morning!

All night long. She sat up all night long, waiting for the sun to show on the horizon. Did she pray the entire time? No, not unless you call crying, running her hands through her hair and sighing, prayer. Every time she closes her eyes, ever since Friday afternoon, all she sees is his defeated body: beaten and bloody, covered in despair.

But she stayed. She and the other women, they stayed, standing a bit of a distance away, but as close as any of the guards would allow. The wind was blowing the foul stench of death and only the fierce rain saved them all from being overwhelmed with the smell. The sight was bad enough. But she and several of the other women, stayed and bore witness to his pain, heard his anguished cries, and then watched as he died. Nothing like anything she had seen before. And now, every time she closes her eyes, it is all she sees. She hasn't slept. She can't sleep.

She, Mary, of Magdelene and the other Mary, watched as Joseph of Arimathea laid his broken body in the tomb. They agreed then, Friday night, that they would come back after the festival is over and do properly what could not have been done that night: wash and anoint his skin, say the prayers, and wrap his body, in linen burial cloths, performing the *tahara*. Embodying the words from Ecclesiastes, "As we come forth, so shall we return." (5:14). Just as a baby is cleaned and wrapped as it enters the world pure, so should we do as we leave the world. They would do this for Him, they agreed.

As the sun rises, she and the other Mary carry the water, spices and linen and walk together to the tomb. As they walk the ground shakes, the stone rolls and an angel appears. The guards, the Roman guards posted at the mouth of the tomb, now look as dead as any of the inhabitants of the nearby graves.

Its still shadowy, still dim, so the women can continue to tell themselves that they are not really seeing what their eyes say; but the messenger of God, perched atop the stone, dressed in white is hard to ignore, and offering words.

The messenger says, "*Don't be afraid,  
 I know you are looking for Jesus who was crucified.  
 He isn't here,  
 because he's been raised from the dead, just as he said.*

*Come, see the place where they laid him.* (Mt 28:5-6)

So, they go into the tomb. And see that there is nothing to see. An absence of a presence is ultimately hard to describe, but His body is gone. His body is gone... what does this mean?

The messenger of God continues on:

*Now hurry, go and tell his disciples,  
 'He's been raised from the dead.*

There are so many options but being alive, is that really one of them? He is not there---but where? Are they afraid? Are they excited?

Again from the Angel,

*"He's going on ahead of you to Galilee.*

*You will see him there." (Mt 28:7)*

They leave the tomb, flee might even be the proper word for their exit, as they look at each other in confusion, fear, joy? They drop their spices, leave the water and abandon the linen and run from the tomb, to go to find the disciples.

Their hearts racing, adrenalin surging, they run as biblical scholar Richard Dietrich says, like little ones running as fast as they can down a grassy hill, unconcerned if they fall, bouncing up if they do, they run, they run as if they are "Afraid for joy". (*Feasting on the Word, Year A, Vol. 2 p 349*)

And there He is, in the path, on the road as they run.

He meets them. He greets them.

They grab his feet and worship him.

In my mind's eye I see him lift them up. Hold them at arm's length. Then says to them,

*"Don't be afraid. Do not be afraid."*

*"Go. Tell my brothers that I am going into Galilee and they will see me there."* (Mt 28:10).

[God, I wish I could see it, how I wish I had been there.] How to describe that meeting?

There never seem to be the right words. But what He said, what Jesus said, changed their lives and upended the world, we literally define time as before his presence and after. We can draw a line from their conversation, their coming together on that distant road, more than 2000 years ago, to you and me, and our presence here, this day, today.

Jesus is Lord, Christ is Risen, He is alive, the words and phrases that have been with me my entire life, assuring me that there is something more. He was dead. Now he is alive. In the tomb, now up from the Grave. There has never been a time in my life when I did not know these words. But I am a priest, now a bishop, because I have spent my adult life wrestling with their meaning. So what? What does it mean, that those women saw a used shroud in the corner of an empty tomb?

I think it means this: I yearn for God. I long for God's holiness and presence in my life. I want more than anything a promise that goodness will prevail. I want your pain, her loneliness, his despair, their sadness, our anger bundled up and taken away. I want a promise that our world, our country is not damned to be split and polarized. I want mercy, compassion, fairness, and justice to far outweigh, retribution, selfishness, cynicism and despair.

On that Friday of that Holy Week, some 2000 years ago, pragmatic cynicism, retribution and fear carried the day and the people of power, killed a man, who threatened what they had. And if nothing had happened on that Sunday morning, Jesus of Nazareth would have been an obscure footnote in a very different world's history.

But something happened. And the stone was rolled, and the tomb was empty, and He met them on the road on his way to Galilee. Something happened on that day, and we are here. And I believe. I believe, in the midst of my fears and failings, my sins and shortcomings, I believe that Jesus is Lord, my sins are forgiven, and He can use me, flawed as I am, he can use us to create the world for which he longs. I believe he rose and that changes everything. What does that mean?

I believe resurrection means there is always something more.

Death and pain do not win.

Gun violence does not have to continue to be the leading cause of death for children in our country.

I believe that there will be a day in our lifetime when we will create the environment that enables us to have an honest accounting and true repentance for the legacy of slavery in our country, and in our churches;

an acknowledgement that leads to a right relationship.

I believe. I have hope. Because he rose.

I believe in the midst of this hard time for our world, that our communities of faith will be changed and transformed to best live out Christ's hope for our world. I believe that we are called to work with the spirit to make this happen.

I believe.

Resurrection is the hard work of holding hope, when the world says all is lost, dead and done. And I believe.

He met them on the road and said Do not be afraid. Go and tell my siblings I am going on ahead to Galilee. I will see you there.

I believe.

Alleluia Christ is Risen, The Lord is Risen indeed. Alleluia.