

Easter—Year B
Acts 10:34-43
Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24
Colossians 3:1-4
Mark 16:1-8

When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint Jesus.

*This year, more than most, **Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Salome**, they have won my heart. **These women knew how to do death**; they knew the **in's and out's of the rituals**; they **understood loss and grief**, and they knew that **everyone was deserving of anointing and a good burial**, even a **criminal the state had deemed worthy of the most shameful death** at their disposal—**crucifixion**. **Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Salome**, they **have been our guides this past year, helping us to find our way with new rituals to mark all that we have lost** on so many levels. We are **more acquainted with death and grief, sin and brokenness**, than we ever imagined possible.*

And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. They had been saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?”

*Don't we know it! This year, we have **struggled to do so many things**, and **so many things were out of reach to us**. Goodness, **we've all been in a tomb** of sorts, sealed away from people we care about, sealed away in our masks, sealed away from all the ordinary, so very normal things in life AND AT THE SAME TIME buried by magnitudes of death, buried by **brokenness and injustice and division and chaos**. *Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to our tombs?**

When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back.

Can we **fathom this possibility? Is it possible that the stone that has sealed us in has already been rolled back?** Can we understand that **THIS is the Easter invitation? The Collect** proclaims today that **“God through Jesus overcame death and opened to us the gate of everlasting life.”** **After all the death of the last year, after all that has been lost**, there is something powerful in this image of **Jesus overcoming death and opening the gate, the gate of everlasting life no less!**

Well, *as they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed.*

Uh, yeah. **Alarmed** is a little **too nicied-up**, a little **too cerebral**. They were **thrown into terror** and that **so undid them that their minds went ka-boom**. They were in their **anointing-for-death groove—nothing** prepared them for either this messenger or his message. **Rational thoughts would not serve them now, logic would not be their friend**; no, the **only place they could land** was simply to **sit in utter, total amazement**.

But he said to them, “Do not be alarmed; don’t let this throw you into terror; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.”

Sisters and brothers, **don’t let all of this throw you into terror.** We’re looking for Jesus who was crucified—*after this year*, we know the shape of the cross; we know where the nails have pierced us; we know all the things that have broken our hearts; we know our capacity as human beings to commit atrocious acts of hate and violence; we know how embedded injustice is in our society how complicit we’ve been.

We’ve spent a year dialing in our vision to see what maybe we hadn’t been able to see before.

Jesus has shown us *how*; Jesus has shown us *the way*; Jesus has helped us to stand before the cross, to *see him there, even to join him there.* We know where to look to see our crucified Lord. But now this young dude dressed in white is telling us, ***“He’s not here. He’s been raised. Look, that’s where they laid him. But he’s not here. You’ve got to go, you’ve got to tell his disciples and Peter, that he’s going on ahead of you to Galilee; that’s where you’ll see him.”***

Jesus has opened the gate to everlasting life. *After a year immersed in death and loss and watching love be crucified over and over, after seeing all the places where they have laid him, can our ears hear, “He’s not here; he’s been raised?” Can our eyes see that the stone has been rolled away and the gate to life has been opened? Can we dare to believe that he’s gone on ahead of us to Galilee? Galilee, for those disciples, Galilee represented life before all of this. What does Galilee look like for us? Can we even remember what life was like before all of this? Can we fathom that Jesus has gone on ahead of us to meet us in that life?*

Of course, it won’t take long in Galilee to realize that *everything* is radically changed. Ronald Rolheiser would remind us in his book *The Holy Longing* that *resurrected life is not a resuscitated one*—it’s a whole different quality of life we’re talking about. *Galilee may look the same, but resurrection has thoroughly changed us. How could it not?* The rising that is ours has come through the cross—there ain’t no going back to normal; there is only skipping through the gate that Jesus has opened and dancing our way into everlasting life. *If we go forward looking for all we knew before, we won’t see Jesus where he’s meeting us now.*

And the white-robed messenger is clear, **Jesus wants us spreading the word**, as the old hymn says, that **“love has come again.”** In some ways, we’ve been holding our breath for a year, and **now today**, Jesus says, ***“Breathe again.”*** No, *this doesn’t mean the pandemic is over, or that we can shed our masks, or stop keeping the daggone six feet between us, or that all the brokenness in our world and our baptismal work for justice is done, but the resurrected life that Jesus has ushered in today, it can hold ALL of this and still call us forward to Galilee. In fact, we have to breathe in resurrection if we are to have the strength to keep doing these hard things. After this long year, today, Jesus calls to us, “Breathe deep of life again; breathe deep of joy again; breathe of play and beauty and goodness and hope—and share all of this with one another. Help one another to believe that as we go forward to Galilee, there we will see the Risen Lord.”*

Now then, there is **one final piece to this Easter morning account from Mark's gospel.**

After the **white-robed young man** had **told the women all of this**, here's what happened next. ***So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.***

They **did not go to the disciples; they did not go to Peter; we don't know if they ever went to Galilee. *They fled from the tomb***, and their minds were so rattled that **all of their terror and amazement turned to plain ol' fear, paralyzing fear, say-nothing-to-anyone fear.** And that's where the story ends.

I've always been glad for Mark's ending. It leaves a lot of room for our humanity as we come **face-to-face with the resurrection. *Sometimes***, good and liberating news of resurrection life is scarier to us than the anxieties and fears we've come to know like old friends. Even hearing of the resurrection from an angelic messenger is **no guarantee *you can take it into your heart. Sometimes***, we just can't do anything but run away, flee even, and ***seal*** the secret of new life ***away*** in our heart, sharing it with ***no one***.

We are presented with a choice this morning. **Risk walking through the open gate into everlasting life, risk the utter transformation and possibility of resurrection life, make peace with the fact that Galilee is probably going to feel really weird *but* we want to meet life there nonetheless OR run away and bury all of our hopes and desires and longings in a new tomb.**

But here's the good news, even if we do that, Jesus will meet us there. It just means we've got another round of Good Friday-Holy Saturday-and Easter to do. We may not be ready to shed our anointing-for-burial spices just yet. ***But make no mistake***, Jesus will rise, the stone will be rolled away, he'll open the gate, and beckon us to follow him into everlasting life ***again***. And he will make this journey with us over and over until we take him up on his offer to join him in Galilee risking a whole new way of being in the world.

It's been a long year. We've **about worn our burial spices out** and are way too familiar with being sealed away.

Look up, the stone is rolled away. You're looking for the Crucified, but he's been raised, and if you'll dare to let your heart leap, you'll know that he's raised you too. Don't be afraid of Galilee; he's already gone ahead of you. He'll meet you there and show you how to dance in this new life. Amen.

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April 4, 2021