

John 20:1-18

Running from and to

Nearly 2000 years after the crucifixion and resurrection, it's difficult for us to experience its full impact on the people of that day. Even though we are filled with the sadness and despair of Good Friday, we know that Easter is near. For the disciples and the women who followed Jesus, Good Friday held no such promise. They watched Jesus tortured, ridiculed and killed. They watched as his dead body was laid in the tomb and the tomb sealed up. They struggled to do the impossible – to say goodbye – to their friend and mentor, to their master and teacher, to the one they believed was to be hope of the world, the Messiah, the Saviour. As someone has put it, the tomb held not only the body of their Lord. It held a crucified hope.



Let's try to imagine what was in the heart of Mary as she came to the tomb that Sunday morning some 2000 years ago – what it must have been like for her when she saw the stone rolled away – what must have been going through her mind as she raced to tell Simon Peter and John. Let's try to imagine what thoughts and feelings must have washed over John and Peter as they race to the tomb to see for themselves – as they see the grave clothes neatly folded, as questions and fears engulf them, as they leave and go back home.

Peter and John leave, but Mary stays behind, weeping, searching, desperately trying to take it in that not only is Jesus dead, but now even his body is gone.

Into this state of mind, this conglomeration of feelings, Jesus comes to Mary and calls her by name. Her confusion is such that she doesn't know him – how could she, having seen what she saw a few short days before? When she does recognize him, she reaches out to hold him, but he holds her off, giving her an assignment – “go and tell my brothers ...” And Mary returns to the disciples to tell them what she's seen and heard.

How utterly confusing all of this must have been, for Mary, for Peter and John, for all the others!

For many, in our world today, perhaps for some/most of us, it remains just as confusing.

Easter morning, the resurrection – we know that they are somehow significant in our faith, to our living and our dying, but what do these really mean to us, for us today?

Someone has said, “The resurrection is not rescue from death, but is rather a journey straight through it [death] to victory.” And Karl Barth writes, “To be saved does not just mean to be a little encouraged. It means to be pulled out like a log from a burning fire.” Henri Nouwen talks about how Easter dawns in fear, but it refuses to stay there. He refers to the angel's message of “Do not be afraid” and he says that if we make the “house of fear” our permanent dwelling, we will find our choices in life narrowed, our capacity for love constricted until we can hardly breathe. Nouwen says that the rhythm of Easter is the movement out of this house of fear, even at the times of our greatest fear and need. When we hear the angel's message, really hear it, Nouwen says, we will be led in the dance from fear and trembling to joy and freedom, until our feet, too, are running with the women and the disciples.

Did you notice the actions of Peter and John, when they get to the tomb? After hearing Mary Magdalene's report that the stone had been moved and Jesus' body stolen, there is literally

a footrace as Peter and John run to see for themselves. John gets there first, but he hesitates. He does not go in. When we think about that, we know that we wouldn't necessarily race in either. Who wants to go to places of death and despair? This dark tomb represents evil and sin and sorrow.

This Easter morning is a good time for us to ask ourselves if those kinds of tombs exist in our lives, if there are places we are afraid to enter, places we don't want to explore, places better left sealed up, hidden forever by the weight of a heavy stone? Are there emotions we have repressed, dysfunctions we've learned to accept, memories we will not acknowledge, sins we dare not name? Are there dark tombs in our lives?

What happens when God rolls away the stones of our tombs? Like John, we hesitate to go in. We want to stay "where it's comfortable" and avoid going into the unknown. However, when we confront the tombs in our lives, it is good to remember this message of Easter promise, "Don't be afraid!"

You see, the stone at the mouth of the tomb is rolled away, not to let Jesus out, but to let us in, so that our lives will not be held ransom to fear, so that we will enter the dance from fear and trembling to joy and freedom.

The Church has always talked about the "empty tomb", but someone has suggested that the tomb isn't empty. "True, Christ's body is gone, but the angel fills the tomb with words that announce that Christ is risen. ... the women have a tomb not containing the body of Christ, but full of the Good News. ... because of Easter, we, with joy, share the Good News."

Share the Good News!!! There's a story about that. Bill and Katherine were amazed to hear their five-year-old daughter telling her friend about Jesus. Karen told her friend, Lindsay, that if she believed in Jesus and prayed, God would forgive her sin and she would go to heaven. Lindsay was convinced and so she prayed. When she was done praying, she looked at Karen and asked, "Will my Mommy go to heaven, too?" Karen replied, "Yes, if she believes in Jesus. But if you don't want her there, don't tell her about Jesus."

Does our failure to tell others about Jesus mean we don't care about their salvation, their eternity?

He is not in the tomb. He is alive and present with us, just as he has said. It's good news. Too good to keep to ourselves.

May the joy of the Lord be your strength, for this day, for our living and serving together, and for always.