

Acts 10: 34-43
Psalm 118:14-17:22-23
Colossians 3:1-14
John 20:1-18

Easter C
St. Barnabas Bainbridge Island
April 17, 2022
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Practice Resurrection

Have you ever walked into a situation that should have made sense, but didn't? Have you ever found yourself in a place you've been countless times, only this time, something was just a bubble off? Have you ever assumed you knew what would come next but what came next was not at all what you knew?

It happens sometimes, perhaps when outside circumstances change and aren't as they should be – like a virus keeping us at home for two years and now we're afraid to come out – or we'd rather just stay home in our fleece pants and watch everything on our ipads. It happens when something changes in a relationship – you may not know what has changed, but you know something's up. It happens. It happens and what we do with what happens can actually change our lives. Think about it. Have you ever paid attention to something you wouldn't normally even notice, and because you did, your day, or your life went in a different direction? Have you ever changed your plans and because you did, something huge happened... or didn't happen to you?

That's what was going on early that Sunday morning when Mary Magdalene went to the tomb, you know. Mary had gone to the garden to be with her beloved teacher because the ache inside her was nearly unbearable. She had been at the foot of the cross. She had watched him die. She had remained faithful to Jesus until the hard and heartbreaking end. And it was all for love. Mary couldn't have abandoned Jesus on the cross any more than she could have abandoned him in the intimacy of their most rich and lively conversations, because real love, the kind of love Jesus had spent his life preaching and teaching, the kind of love Mary Magdalene experienced in Jesus and in that community of discipleship, that love never, ever dies. It's what brought her back to the garden that sad Sunday morning – she wanted to be with Jesus, not just to remember him, but to be with him. To sit with him and to sink into the love she had known.

But when she arrived, she knew something was very wrong. The massive stone that had sealed the tomb had been moved. Yes, we know this, we hear this every year, so perhaps we don't pay close attention. We certainly aren't as shocked as Mary was. But consider this - it would be like rounding the corner to our columbarium, the interium, and instead of hearing the birds, the calming sounds of the bubbling O'Morchoe fountain and the wind blowing through the tall fir trees, instead of smelling the daphne and seeing the glorious flowers in spring bloom... instead of all that softness and beauty... what if you rounded that corner and saw niches opened up, name plaques upended and the ashes of your beloved... gone.

No wonder Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. The men had gone home, but just as she had stayed at the foot of the cross, Mary stayed at the tomb, and because she stayed, she saw the angels. When they asked her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" deeply distressed, she could only say "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." And then something happened – perhaps the snap of a twig or a scent wafting through the air – something happened because before there was time for any angelic response, Mary turned from the tomb and saw a man in front of her, a man she assumed to be the gardener.

That's how it is, right? We see what we expect to see, which sometimes means we miss a lot. Mary was in the garden so of course she assumed she was looking at the gardener. She must still have been crying because even the gardener asked "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" She told him the same thing she'd told the disciples and the angels..."Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away."

Jesus said to her, "Mary!" And in that word, everything changed.

It wasn't the first word he'd spoken to her. It wasn't his appearance; it wasn't even his voice that caught her attention. She hadn't known him when she saw him or when he called her "woman." She knew him when he spoke her name, and when he did, everything she knew about the way the world worked, about the way life and death work, fell away. Jesus had died. She was there, she saw it, she felt it, she knew it. And yet, here he was, her beloved teacher. And when Jesus called her by name, she didn't just reply "teacher" or "Jesus" or "Lord" ... she said Rabounni – my teacher. My beloved teacher. "Mary." "Rabounni."

A lot of other very important things get said after that, and a lot of important things before, but we will never begin to understand their importance until we understand what Jesus has done here, in this moment. The simple act of speaking Mary's name, of seeing her, knowing her, recognizing her changed everything... Mary... Rabounni. It's so beautiful. It couldn't possibly have been true, but there it was. I have been seen and so I see. Death, resurrection, the paschal mystery, the beauty of the Christian story, the reality that life wins that love wins, that God redeems absolutely everything... all these things come to their deepest meaning in the particular - in the reality that God knows your name, and makes all these things true, in you.

I'm not sure exactly what brings each one of you to church today, but I'm guessing there are questions out there. Is God real? Does God really give us life? Is God truly the Creator, who created the laws of nature, and then completely messed with them and resurrected Jesus? Is this something I should believe and build my life on? If you're not sure, or sure that any of this matters, if things have happened to you that have caused you to doubt the possibility of a living, loving, lifegiving God, know you are not alone. But know too, that the resurrection wasn't some sort of otherworldly magic trick. Resurrection is a way to live. Do we understand

it? No. Do we need to? No, we do not. I cannot “make sense” of the resurrection any more than you can, but what I do know is that I experience resurrection in my life and in yours, so I believe it. I experience it when someone who has just received a difficult diagnosis decides to live her life with deep intentionality for as long as she lives. I experience it when someone finally decides to go into treatment for a long-denied addiction. I experience it in baptism, in marriage and even in the divorce that will finally allow people to live into their lives fully, lovingly, authentically. I experience it each time I know myself as beloved.

Understanding is so different from believing, from having faith, from what some would call the craziness of hoping it’s true. But tell me. Would you prefer to live in the world as someone who believes that truth and beauty and hope and goodness and love are true? Or would you prefer to live as though none of that were true, and the ugliness of the world as it presents itself these days is actually all there is? It’s not a frivolous question. It’s a question you could stake your life on. Hope or hopelessness? One cannot prove either. How then shall we live?

The resurrection faith Mary Magdalene showed us, is a beautiful, gentle, faithful reminder of what it is to believe that love transcends everything... anger, vengeance, politics, power, hate, fear, even death. Love transcends everything. We learned that from Jesus. And from Mary Magdalene we learn that faith... the pure and simple willingness to believe the truth that is right in front of us no matter how “unrealistic” that truth might seem, faith, gives life. Not just for you and for me and the ones we love, but life for the whole wide world. The miracle isn’t just that the tomb is empty... an even bigger miracle is that we can live our lives always and everywhere, just like Mary, encountering the risen Lord. You see, God is alive and at work in the world, and if you pay attention, you can’t help but see it.

That might be hard for you to believe, with all the terrible and difficult things going on out there right now – war, politics, power-mongering, racism, hatred, greed, covid, the utter lack of concern for the ones who will inherit the mess we’ve made. In the face of all that, how can we claim hope is alive? Well, look around. Here, in this beloved St Barnabas community, we encourage each other, support each other and together, and because we do, we make an impact on the world that is so much bigger than the sum of our precious parts. We are Christians, resurrection people, and our job is to hold hope for the world. Not the ideal of hope, but real hope, hope infused with the power of love, hope that acts in the world.

And that, my dears, is not what the world would have us believe. There are all sorts of people and things that tell us being filled with hope is ridiculous, unwarranted, and certainly not very smart. And still, our God is the God whose name is Love, the God who calls each one of us by name to be the hope the whole wide world is waiting for. We have a choice – we always do. We can live in resurrection hope, or we can live in hopelessness. We can believe in death, or we can believe in life. We can live in fear, or we can live in love. We can believe God knows our names, or not. But really, all you have to do is listen... the God who loves you is calling your name, whispering, whispering Practice Resurrection. Amen