

Acts 10:34-43
1 Corinthians 15:19-26
John 20:1-18
Psalm 118:1-2,14-24

Easter Sunday C
St. Barnabas Bainbridge Island
April 20, 2025
The Rev. Karen Haig

Practice Resurrection

As many of you know, I have had the great good fortune of serving as the school chaplain in every place I've served as an ordained priest. It is an amazement and a delight to walk with the little ones through the school year and through the liturgical year. As Holy days and holidays approach, I often ask if there is any special day coming up. "Easter" they most recently proclaimed! "What do you think about when you think about Easter?" I asked. "Easter Eggs! Easter Egg hunts! Bunnies! My bunny! Chocolate bunnies! CANDY!" "Yes, yes, all of that is so" I say, "but do you know about the very first Easter? Do you know what happened to Jesus on Easter?" A little quiet. Not all of these little people have heard of Jesus, but mostly everyone wants to join in.

"He got born." Said one. "Ahh," I said. "When Jesus was born, that was the gift of Christmas". "He died." Said another. "That's so close" I said, "Jesus died three days before Easter on a day we call Good Friday." And then one little boy with a very thoughtful face, and eyes full of wonder said, "He came back alive." "Yes, it's true," I said. "He came back alive." "How did that happen?" a little friend asked. "It's a mystery" I said. "It isn't something that is easy to understand. It's ok. We don't need to understand it for it to be true. Some things are mysterious. God is mysterious. And God is true."

Often times, little people are better at mystery than we grown-ups are. We grown-ups want to have reasons and explanations for things. We want to know what to expect, know how things will go. We want things to be predictable and controllable. But as it turns out, life sometimes just refuses to be predictable or controllable. Sometimes life is a mystery.

Something mysterious was going on early that Sunday morning when Mary Magdalene went to the tomb. 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 Magdalene 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 kind of 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, something was very wrong. The massive stone that had sealed the tomb had been rolled away. 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 interium - the columbarium right around the back of the church, and instead of hearing song birds, the burbling 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 strewn everywhere 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." But then something happened – perhaps the snap of a twig or a scent wafting through the air, and Mary turned from the tomb to see a man standing nearby, 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 she assumed she was seeing 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 moment, 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 works, 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. A lot of other very important things were said after that, and a lot of important things before, but we will never begin to understand their importance until we understand what Jesus had done there, in that moment.

In the simple act of speaking Mary's name, of seeing her, knowing her, recognizing her, Jesus changed everything... It couldn't possibly have been true, but there it was. *I have been seen and so I see*. The paschal mystery that is dying and rising, 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 that God makes all these things true, in you.

What brought you to church today? Some of you, maybe lots or all of you have questions. 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 by resurrecting 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 your lives, so I believe it. I experience resurrection when someone who has just received a difficult diagnosis decides to live his life with deep intentionality for as long as he lives. I experience it when someone at last decides to go into

treatment for an addiction she has long denied. I experience it in baptism, in marriage and in the divorce that will finally allow people to live in to their lives fully, lovingly, and 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 God is a mystery and that love transcends everything, if we let it... 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 "unreal" 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, the Gospel, the Good News isn't just that the tomb is empty. Oh surely that's essential, but the bigger miracle, the miracle for us, right here, right now, is that we can live our lives, our regular, precious, everyday lives, encountering the risen Lord. Because as it turns out, the one who has died, lives and hope is alive! 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 to believe, with all the terrible and difficult things going on out there right now – war, politics, power-mongering, racism, hatred, greed, utter contempt 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 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, naïve, even unwise. And yet, 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