

Easter Day, 12 April 2020

John 20:1-18

St. Michael's Episcopal Church, Norman Oklahoma

The Rev. Jason Haddox

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

In her sermon for Good Friday, Deacon Laura Blazek quoted a meme that's been making the rounds on social media lately: "This is the Lentiest Lent that I've ever Lented."

We have been compelled to give up a great deal this Lenten season—beyond chocolate, or bourbon, or meat. We have been asked to voluntarily quarantine ourselves behind closed doors, to distance ourselves from one another, to refrain from visiting loved ones in the hospital or senior living facilities. To avoid hugging, even the people we love most—perhaps especially those whom we love most. We are gathered this day to celebrate the Resurrection, not in a church full of music and flowers and new clothes—but gathered at a distance, from home, meeting in our own places.

It is a time of confusion and uncertainty. We don't know what will happen next, or when, or to whom. We don't know how to make plans in this situation—or if "making plans" even makes sense at all. We don't know where to turn. We're making it up as we go, using what tools and resources we have available.

And it is for this reason, I say to you, people of God, St. Michael's Church, wherever you find yourself right now, this very moment: This Easter of 2020 is, I suspect, the Easteriest Easter that we have ever Eastered.

Listen again to the Gospel: Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalen came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed... "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him!"

Peter and the beloved disciple run to see for themselves. But "...they did not understand."
So they go home and go back to bed.

Mary stands weeping outside the tomb.

She is TIRED. She hasn't slept in days.

She is GRIEVING. Her friend, the person she cared about most, has been abused and tortured and murdered by the civil authorities.

She is ANGRY. After everything that has already happened, now someone has come along and robbed the grave! Could they not even let him lie there in peace??

She is BEWILDERED. Who could have done this thing? What have they done with him?

She did not know what. Or how. Or who.

Three times we hear that statement: "She did not know..."

And then, in her tired, grieving, angry, bewildered condition, she notices something. Someone.

It's too early in the day for anyone to be about, but someone is.

Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?

Whom are you looking for?

The same question Jesus asks his first two disciples at the beginning of the story, as they are trailing after him after John the Baptist has declared “Here is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”

Whom are you looking for?

The same question Jesus asks the police, in the Garden of Gethsemane, when they come to arrest him. They are astonished to discover that they have actually found the one they were seeking.

In the words of poet and hymnwriter Fred Pratt Green:

“They did not know, as we do now,
that glorious is your crown;
that thorns would flower upon your brow,
your sorrows hear our own...
though empires rise and fall,
your Kingdom shall not cease to grow
‘till Love embraces all.”
(“To mock your reign”, Hymn 170)

Mary does not know.

Everything that has happened,
and everything that has happened after that,
has thrown her into confusion.

Nothing is as it is supposed to be.

He’s supposed to be dead! And in the tomb!
But the tomb is empty, and he is not here...

And even when she realizes,
even when she does know,
even when she hears Jesus call her by her own name,
she still has more to learn.

Do not hold on to me, Jesus says. (Social distancing?)
I have work to do, and so do you. GO. TELL.
And don’t worry whether they believe you or not.
Now you know. You have heard, and seen, and touched.
You have something to share.

She goes to tell the others—even still confused and bewildered and amazed.

I have seen the Lord.

She barely recognized him.

He was there, and then gone again in a moment.

But it was what she needed, in the way she needed, that day,
early in the morning, just the two of them.

No trumpet blasts; no lilies;
no new dresses and hats;
no festival dinner with all the cousins.

Just the two of them, at the empty tomb
early in the morning, on the first day of a new week.

And it was the beginning of a new life, a new world, a new identity.
Mary of Magdala, messenger of Jesus Christ, risen from the dead,
Mary the Tower, Apostle to the Apostles.

The first Easter, in solitude and confusion and astonishment...
and we are here, two thousand years later on the other side of the planet
(depending on where you're watching this from)
because she did Go and Tell.

In her amazement and surprise and not-really-understanding it all,
She went and told. She shared what she had received.
And the world was changed forever.

Alleluia, Christ is risen!