

Reflection Easter Sunday 2024

By Rev Dr Fei Taule'ale'ausumai

Very early in the morning on that first Easter Day around 2000 years ago, Mary Magdalene went to the garden tomb alone. Why did she go? She couldn't do much by herself. She would need several men with the right lifting gear to shift the great stone closing the entrance to the tomb. And she'd need the other women to help embalm the body of Jesus. So why go alone? Perhaps, with the stress of the previous week or so, she couldn't sleep and was just wandering aimlessly, but found herself drawn like a magnet to the grave of the person she loved.

She noticed instantly that the stone had been rolled away. Her first thought in her shock at that discovery, was to tell someone else, to share the horror and the fear. So, she ran to Peter, the acknowledged leader of the band of disciples, who was with a friend, and she told them. But Mary didn't tell them exactly what she'd seen. She made an assumption, and she told the two disciples her interpretation of events: "They've taken away the Lord, and we don't know where they've put him."

That how it was for Mary who went to the tomb that Easter morning to anoint Jesus body with oils, her grief was still so raw, and she went expecting to find his body in the tomb, but on arrival was shocked to find that the tomb was empty, and the body of Jesus was no longer there. Where have you taken him Mary asked? She asked thinking that he had been moved somewhere else, she didn't expect that he might have risen from the dead.

What was it like for Mary? After surviving the unthinkable horror of that Friday, on the first day of the week in the early morning darkness, she was dealt the crowning blow, one more unfathomable event in the long string of atrocities. The stone was rolled away; the tomb was empty; the body was gone.

"Why are you weeping?" the angel asked. Mary might well have asked the angel, "Why not? If you're not weeping, you haven't been paying attention." Don't you read the papers, listen to the radio, watch the evening news? Haven't you noticed? The principalities and powers of evil are running rampant.

She ran back with the news: They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have laid him. The helplessness opened the floodgate of tears. There was nothing she could do. They have taken him away, and I don't know where. It was more than she could bear.

Peter and the other disciple ran to the tomb to see for themselves. He saw the grave clothes neatly folded, but he didn't go in. Perhaps he was frightened. It would take courage to walk into a tomb where you'd expect to see and smell a mangled body, especially the body of a dearly loved friend.

There was nothing Mary could do as she sat weeping in the cemetery, the one she had mistaken for the gardener called her name Mary he said. Peering through the tears, Mary recognized Jesus. He's alive he has risen from the dead.

What do the Easter stories mean? Marcus Borg wants to offer an answer to this question.

He says there are two primary meanings in the Easter stories. First, Jesus lives. Secondly, Jesus is Lord. To speak to the first meaning; Jesus continues to be experienced by his followers in the way that followers of Jesus have continued to experience him throughout the centuries as a living figure of the present. Marcus thinks his followers had visions of the risen Christ. Paul's experience on the Damascus road was clearly a vision and Marcus does not think his opponents would deny that. Visions are not all hallucinations. Some visions are psychotic but some visions are disclosures of something that is real.

Borg sees Easter as Jesus lives, he is a figure of the present not simply of the past. You won't find Jesus among the dead because he continues to be with us. He says, God has vindicated Jesus against the contemporary powers of the world primarily the Roman imperialist empire. Good Friday is the Roman imperial 'No' to Jesus where Easter is God's 'Yes' to Jesus and what he stood for. The meanings of Easter are both deeply personal and political. Personal because the path of Christianity is about transformation or death of a former self and rebirth of a new self and political in that the affirmation that Jesus is Lord and the powers of this world are not.

Today we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. Without looking at the science or historicity I can only offer the renewing, transformative grace and love that we can receive from the resurrection story. Of course I too still struggle to understand how a God of love can will for his Son to be killed in such a cruel and tortuous way. God didn't need to do that. Nothing can justify such a heinous act of cruelty. There is much anti-Semitism blaming the Jews for killing Jesus, but it was the Roman's who condemned him and crucified him.

When all hope appears to be lost, what can one do but weep? When people die, we weep and we grieve, and everyone grieves differently. Some of us have a delayed reaction to grief and it takes a while before it finally sinks in, sometimes our grief waits until all the visitors have left, and we finally have a moment to take stock of everything that has happened, and we suddenly feel so alone.

Our grief takes many forms, we grieve for the death of loved ones, we grieve for our pets when they die, we grieve for our marriages when they are over, we grieve for our jobs when we lose them, we grieve for our houses when the bank seizes them, and we have a mortgagee sale. We grieve for relationships lost with friends and family when unresolved conflict becomes the poison that keeps people apart. When you're held captive to the economic recession which seems to be consuming our everyday existence. We are caught by redundancies, unemployment, as well as consumerism, limited choices and options.

Sometimes it seems as if there is no choice left but to weep. But have they not heard, have we not heard that Mary was the first ambassador to go and continue to tell the good news that Jesus was alive?

But Christians the world over are celebrating today as a triumph over death. The clichéd saying within Christendom is there cannot be a resurrection without a crucifixion. You cannot go from happy clappy Palm Sunday straight to Easter Sunday and avoid Good Friday. Even when we ourselves feel as if we have been crucified, misjudged, misunderstood, misrepresented, we wonder if there will ever be a reprieve. Our relationships break down because we have to walk away because it's just too hard. We don't want to deal with it because we believe it is just unfixable. That is when we don't know how to love them.

At the end of the story for today, Mary Magdalene was no longer weeping, sobbing, crying. By the end of the story for today's gospel lesson, Mary Magdalene was convinced that she had seen the risen Lord. And because she had seen the risen Lord, that affected her tears and crying. And Mary went and told the disciples, "I have seen the Lord." Mary Magdalene was no longer weeping; she had seen the Lord.

Instead of tears there was triumph in her voice. Instead of sorrow, there were signs of relief that she had seen the risen Christ. "I have seen the Lord. I have seen the resurrection."

The gospel of the resurrection triumphs over our feelings of deepest loss and sorrow. It is not that our human feelings go away, but that the truth of the Easter gospel is stronger than our feelings of sadness.

In Jesus Christ Super star Mary Magdalene sings "I don't know how to love him, what to do how to move him, I've been changed so really changed. In these past few days when I see myself, I seem like someone else."

Often in life the people we love the most are sometimes the ones we struggle to love when we have an argument or misunderstanding. The question I don't know how to love him/her/she/he passes through our lips, and it's fight or flight when we think with our heads and not our hearts.

We don't know ourselves when someone pushes our buttons. We feel like someone else. The Easter transformation gives us the opportunity to learn again how to love those that have hurt us so that we can get back to feeling and being ourselves again. The slate is clean, and we can start again. We all

like to have a second chance to make things right again and learn to love those that we find hard to love. The Easter story helps us to seek reconciliation to help us to let go of all that has hurt us over the years and learn to live lives of hope, look towards life in all its fullness. Seeing the glass half full instead of half empty.

Mary realized she was not helpless. There was something she could do. She moved from weeping to witnessing. I have seen the Lord! Mary discovered new purpose, new possibility. She had found that she could love him after all.

This is a day to celebrate, Easter helps set free from all that binds us and worries us! So even though we weep at the atrocities of this world, we are encouraged get up from the table and follow Jesus' way of justice and peace for all humanity.

In a few minutes we will be celebrating the Communion together. May this be an opportunity for you to be refreshed and renewed in your own faith or non-faith journeys wherever you are whatever you believe or don't believe you are welcome at this table. Amen.