

St. Mary's and Trinity Episcopal Churches

April 16th, 2017

Year A; Easter Sunday

Jeremiah 31: 1-6

Psalm 118: 1-2; 14-24

Colossians 3: 1-4

John 20: 1-18

"In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." Amen.

Alleluia!!

I am so happy to gather together this morning as God's people, and to wish you all a blessed and joyous Easter!

The 4 Gospels--Matthew, Mark, Luke and John----each tells the story of the first word of the resurrection of Jesus, they each tell it slightly differently, but with the basic elements always the same....

- **Jesus has been buried in a tomb, a cave, his body quickly wrapped for burial, but the work not completed as sundown Friday marked the start of the Jewish Sabbath, the day of rest and preparing a body was considered work, and thus not allowed.**
- **So, as the sabbath ended at sundown Saturday, as early as possible the women who followed Jesus and cared for him, the women have planned to return to the tomb and finish this sacred work of preparing Jesus's body. The different Gospels tell variously of the women coming together or alone, but it is always the women coming to do this last task for Jesus.**
- **All the Gospels tell of the women finding the tomb empty, and of heavenly messengers, angels, meeting the women at the empty tomb and bringing them word of the resurrection of Jesus.**
- **And thus in all 4 gospels it is the women who are first told of the resurrection, and are given the honor of telling the others.**

This year, we read the resurrection account in the Gospel of John, which tells of Mary Magdalene coming alone in darkness, the early hours of Sunday morning.

She must have left home still in the dark of the night, making her way to the tomb, arriving there before dawn....in the last moonlight or the first grey hints of dawn light, Mary can see that something is wrong at the tomb.

The massive stone rolled in front of the tomb has been moved, an extraordinary task that would have take 2 or 3 strong men to accomplish...and yet here in the darkness she can see the stone has been moved and the tomb is open.

Mary is horrified, hopeless, and can only think of death, and runs to get a couple of the disciples, to come and see too....She brings them the news: "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him."

The 2 men run ahead of Mary, look into the tomb and see the grave clothes lying there....

Those grave cloths evocative of so recently, it was Lazarus who had been wrapped up in similar cloths, and it was Jesus who had called out to him and raised Lazarus!, and then called out too to those standing around..."unbind him and let him go"...

But now...only the cloths are here, nothing else....

The disciples leave the tomb and Mary arrives again, and still alone....weeping.

Mary can see no life, no hope, only death....and she is deeply grieved.

She stoops to look into the tomb, and sees 2 angels dressed all in white....sitting exactly where the body was! And yet, Mary still cannot see hope and life, despite, angels.....2 of them!

And so kindly, the angels ask why she is weeping, still weeping....

And again, all she can see is death, no hope, no resurrection.....

She replies:

"They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him."

Again the language of death, of a body, laid out.....

And as she is looking into the tomb, in the direction of death...Something stirs....does she hear a sound or sense a presence? Something makes her turn around....and there is a man standing there.

The man asks the same question that the angels asked: “Woman, why are you weeping?”

Well, the sight of angels could not give Mary hope, and this man does not either....And for the 3rd time, Mary uses the language of death...

“If you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him...”

We are all Mary, when we grieve, when we are desolate and feeling so alone....all we can speak is death.....not hope, not life, not resurrection....

And then the man who is, of course, Jesus, simply calls her name....Mary....the shepherd calls his sheep and knows them each....and we know our shepherd’s voice...

Jesus calls out: “Mary!”But somehow, as she spoke to the man she assumed was the gardener, Mary’s eyes and orientation had returned to the tomb, to the place of death, and thus when he calls her name, she must turn again, away from death, to see resurrection right in front of her, and she finally can see him and call to him.....Rabbi!!

Jesus tells her, honors her by appearing first to her, a woman in that society where women had no status, no rights.....and Jesus tells her to go and tell the others, to be an eyewitness.

And Mary goes, no longer weeping, no longer speaking of bodies laid out, of death and no hope.

She tells the others, in a voice filled with hope and resurrection: “I have seen the Lord.”

Mary can now see beyond the tomb, she knows that death is not the last word in her life, and it is not in any of our lives, in all of our resurrection lives, death is never the last word.

And from Mary on that first Easter, to all of us gathered here today, we are called to speak up too, and share the hope of our faith.....

As Michael Curry, our Presiding Bishop, says: "Go forth to be the people of the Resurrection."

In this hurting and lost world, so often full of anger and despair, we are called to follow in Mary's footsteps, to be people of the Resurrection, sharing God's radical and lifegiving love.

Alleluia indeed! Amen.

The Rev. Megan Limburg