

## **Resurrection while Living Holy Saturday**

Easter Sunday, April 12, 2020

John 20-1-18

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In 1995 Brian and I were part of the planning for Kairos 95, a young adult event in the United Church. The theme that year was Threads and the Common Cloth and followed the story of Jesus' life, with each day inviting people to share their experiences of Jesus' story in the context of their life experience. On the day we marked Good Friday, there was a morning service that included the breaking of pottery which shocked people and led to stories of major pain. The small group leaders described a major release of emotions within their groups. As a planning team, we had planned for this – but what surprised us was the day we focused on Easter. There was an expectation of the theme planning team – that this day was going to be about joy and celebration pulling us out of the pain of Good Friday. Yet every story that was shared about personal new life and hope, included stories of the pain and challenge that came before these moments. It was the first time for many of us who grew up with an empty cross within our churches that we recognized that resurrection is so amazing because it comes out of this pain. We realized that without pain and suffering there is no resurrection. As people of faith, without Good Friday with its pain and death, there is no resurrection, no Easter. That is why all three services of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter are so important, and in the Lutheran and Anglican traditions are considered one service. We can't really celebrate and talk about Easter and resurrection without talking about crucifixion.

In our reading from John today, we enter into the grief and sadness of Mary and the disciples in the story. They have been left bereft, their hopes dashed with the death of Jesus. The death of their hopes for liberation, for peace and justice and righteousness. It was a time of deep, deep, despair. This is Holy Saturday time, the time between death and resurrection. In the midst of this mood, Mary decides to visit the tomb. We don't know why. In other gospels she goes with others to anoint the body as was the tradition. When she sees the stone rolled away, her immediate thought is not that Jesus had risen, but that the body had been stolen, which was all too common in the time. In her grief, and it was the same with the disciples, initially, they had forgotten all that Jesus had said about rising again. As we move through this time of physical distancing, many of us are experiencing grief. Grief of not being able to get together with family and friends,

of not being able to gather as church community, of not working or going to school as usual. In the midst of that grief, we can miss the blessings, the new life that can be emerging in this time. We can forget the message of hope and love that is part of our faith.

Mary gets the two disciples, Peter and John, who see the empty tomb and grave cloths and then return home, believing but not understanding. Mary stays, still weeping and then has appearances from angels, and rather than the usual experience of fear that one has when an angel appears, she accuses the angels of taking the body, lashing out in her grief with anger. Then she turned around and sees Jesus without recognizing him, until he brings her out of her emotional turmoil by saying her name, and Mary sees him. She then goes and tells the disciples that she has seen the Lord. It is interesting to note that in both Matthew and in the Mark reading which we heard today in the Theme Time, it identifies that even after they recognize Jesus or know that he has been raised, the women are still afraid. Their grief is transformed to hope and joy, yet they still are afraid, uncertain of what it all really means. It is safe to say Mary would also have this fear in Johns' gospel. We can experience fear and grief, and still feel joy and hope.

As we live through this present time, many of us find ourselves living with fear and anxiety. As the angels assured the people in the gospel stories not to be afraid, we too are challenged not to be afraid. Some may say, in Christ, there is nothing to fear, but the challenge is overcoming the fear that can feel so real. It is living in fear that can paralyze us. What is important is discerning what fears are based in reality and then addressing how to continue living in the midst of the possibilities that we are afraid of. Overcoming fear takes courage. As we live in this pandemic, we need courage to continue on with our lives the best we can, supporting one another, while honouring the precautions we need to take these days, and not allowing the reality of the times to paralyze us. Our faith story today tells us that we can have fear and joy in these times. Jesus brings us hope and new life, even in the midst of fear and grief.

Cameron Trimble of Convergence US, and The United Church of Christ in her daily reflection wrote on Friday:

Easter is a story of how God took the brokenness of crucifixion and transformed it into new life through resurrection. God made something

new, something even more beautiful in the Risen Christ. We can trust God to do this with us. This season, where everything is off and you may feel broken to your core, consider that God is creating within you someone more beautiful for having been broken.

I would like to invite you to think about your experience this past month. What have you found broken, painful, and what are you grieving? In the context of that grief and pain, what new life and hope and joy have you experienced? What is your experience of resurrection or glimpses of resurrection in the midst of this Holy Saturday time we are experiencing together?

As we move through this time together, may we be able to celebrate the new life in Christ we experience in so many ways and hold on to the hope of resurrection as we struggle with the challenges of these days. I wish to end with this poem by John Shelby Spong

*A single life among many lives.  
Here  
among us, out from us,  
and yet this power, this essence,  
was not from us at all,  
for the Christpower that was seen in Jesus  
is finally of God.*

*And even when the darkness of death overwhelmed him,  
the power of life resurrected him;  
for Christpower is life  
eternal,  
without beginning, without ending.  
It is the secret of creation.  
It is the goal of humanity.*

*Here in this life we glimpse  
that immortal  
invisible  
most blessed  
most glorious*

*almighty life-giving force  
of this universe  
in startling completeness  
in a single person.*

*Men and women tasted the power that was in him  
and they were made whole by it.  
They entered a new freedom,  
a new being.  
They knew resurrection and what it means to live  
in the Eternal Now.  
So they became agents of that power,  
sharing those gifts from generation to generation,  
creating and re-creating,  
transforming, redeeming,  
making all things new.*