

Mary Magdelene and the other Mary went to the tomb because they saw no better place to be. They had been in the upper room when Christ shared a final meal with his followers and friends. They had been at prayer when Christ was awaiting his arrest, and they followed his every beleaguered step to the place of the skull. The women kept vigil with Christ as he suffered the humiliation and pain of the cross. They were there to witness the last breath as it left his exhausted lungs, and they stayed near as he was taken down from the tree and laid in a tomb. From the beginning of his life and ministry until his last shuddering breath, women provided for and followed Jesus. Mary his mother accepted the descending Holy Spirit and bore the son of God into the world, feeding and nurturing and teaching him. Along his journey of ministry, women provided food, shelter, and hospitality to Jesus and his disciples. Women questioned Jesus and challenged him and even argued with him. Women brought their children to him to be healed and blessed. Women brought themselves to him, in their brokenness and illness and vulnerability, to be saved by his healing power and loving grace. Even in the darkest morning, before the sun had even begun to rise, these same faithful women who chose to walk in solidarity with Christ as he labored to his death, choose to bring their grief, their pain, their uncertainty and their doubt to the grave where our Lord had been laid. They saw no better place to be than the last place that Christ would rest, where his divinely human body would, they thought, return to the dust.

What they found there was enough to shake the foundations of the earth, enough to reduce powerful Roman soldiers to human rubble, paralyzed with fear. The sight of the stone rolled away, the flashing and supernatural vision of the messenger of God, could have been enough to bring anyone to their knees. But not those whose eyes had seen the glory of the Lord pierced with nails and crowned with thorns. The messenger tells these followers of Jesus not to be afraid, not because they fear him, but because now they need not fear anything. The tomb is empty, because death has been defeated. The stone was rolled away not to release an undead body, but to reveal to faithful witnesses that their faithfulness had never been in vain. The tomb was already barren, and now the message needed to be borne.

And so they left quickly, with fear and great joy. With fear and great joy. They are told, be not afraid, but their fear is not erased. It is overcome by something greater. The grief and the apprehension and the infinite uncertainties have not evaporated into nothingness, but have been resurrected into something both familiar and altogether new. The Gospel, the good news, wells up in each of us the same way, with fear and trembling and great joy and enormous doubt.

The reality of fear is not denied by the resurrected Christ. When in their haste Mary and Mary Magdalene stumble upon him on the road to Galilee, he tells them Do not be afraid; go. He does not say this to minimize their fear, but to remind them of the truth that this fear cannot rule them. Fear is natural, unavoidable. But to be afraid, to be governed by our fears, is to turn back toward the tomb, to hold the good news that is entrusted to us and to bury it under our insecurities and inadequacies. To be afraid is to allow ourselves to be silenced. But like the women on the road, Christ ushers us on, toward his brothers and sisters, who have yet to hear

the news we bear. Our time of weeping at the tomb has passed, it is now the time to proclaim resurrection, to tell our human family that God is alive and we have seen him.

As we hurtle toward our brothers and sisters with the promises of God on our lips—that is where we meet Christ, or rather, that is where Christ meets us. Not in the empty tomb, but on the road. On our way. That is the message of hope the spirit has granted us in this Easter lesson, in this particular Gospel passage at this particular time in history. We are still here, because two women refused to turn their gaze away from Jesus, even in his pain and death. We are still here because they ran with fear and great joy to tell others what they themselves could hardly believe. We are still here, reading these words and singing these hymns and lighting this flame because they did not stop running. And neither will we. Because Jesus has gone ahead of us, and will meet us on our way. Because he already has. Because Jesus Christ, risen today, IS our way.