

Sermon: Easter Morning

The Rev. Mike Wernick

April 16, 2017

Year A

Jeremiah 31:1-6

Psalms 118:1-2, 14-24

Colossians 3:1-4

John 20:1-18

Throughout Lent... we have heard about a prayer room... a womb... a well... about washing in a pool... and a tomb... last Sunday there was a triumphal entry... what seemed like an unbelievable victory... a justifiable victory... but just two days ago... the Cross... unbelievable failure... at least what the world thought of... saw as... believed was failure... two weeks ago... a stone was rolled away from a tomb... so that Lazarus could be called out... but today there is a different tomb... with its stone already rolled away...

Mary Magdalene discovered it... she ran to tell the others... they came... she stood outside... alone... weeping... grieving... and actually... if you go strictly by what the text says... Mary couldn't have known... what she said to Simon Peter and the disciple whom Jesus loved... there's no indication... none whatsoever... that Mary looked inside the tomb until after the two men left... but even so... she said that someone had taken Jesus... they looked inside... and saw for themselves that Jesus was gone...

But we don't hear anything about how Simon Peter... and the disciple whom Jesus loved... we don't hear anything about how they may have paused... and consoled Mary... we're told that the beloved disciple believed... but there's no record of a gentle hug... or some words of encouragement... or an invitation to come over so she won't be alone... there's no indication that they planned to sit *shiva*... or say prayers... their grief must have been so overwhelming... that they could not see past themselves... so overwhelming that they could do no more than just leave...

And it's only after the two men left... that we're told Mary looked in... and she saw the two Angels sitting where Jesus had been lying... and they asked her... *Woman... why*

are you weeping... I think the angels came for Mary... I think the angels came because they knew that Mary could move from failure to victory... more easily than the men could...

But this scene is also like the one in which the Pharisees could not see past the fact that Jesus healed on the Sabbath... they could not get their heads around the fact that he healed the man born blind... and so Mary... instead of being startled... or scared... or asking... *Who are you?!?! ...* all Mary can see... is that Jesus is missing... all Mary knows... is that there is loss...

We dislike losing... our keys or wallet or purse... we dislike losing a baseball game... or a promotion... or an argument... to someone else... losing reminds us that we're not special... that we're not in control... *and I need to remind myself... that even when I don't lose... I'm still not in control...* and there are events in our lives which may seem like victories... which may take us from where we were... to a new place... to a new way of being... but they may only be way-stations... temporary stopping points... not the physical or emotional places where we will finally land...

And the same thing is true of what we call failures... these too are not final... there's another kind of victory that is final... and so what is key... what is crucial... is whether we're aware not only of our physical realm... but of our emotional and spiritual one too... and how we approach and process them...

Ayanna Watkins wrote... The two men come... and look... and leave... but Mary stays... though she doesn't understand any better than they do... she remains at the site of her grief and cries... strangers meet her there... they ask her why she cries... and she is forced to revisit the pain by naming it again and again... Ayanna wrote... I already knew that grief is a process you can't rush or control... you mostly just survive its waves until you realize they're easing up... little by little... but Mary manages to do more than survive... somehow she emerges with something she did not have before...

staying at the site of her loss... not running away... but letting herself experience and express the pain... she encounters revelation... and when the strangers she meets compel her to name her pain... she realizes that things are not quite as she thought...

Things were not quite as I thought either... I was in my early thirties before I realized how dry... how barren my emotional landscape was... before I realized that I gave myself permission to feel only a few feelings... some of the basics... like tired... or hungry... or happy... or disappointed... or angry... but I knew nothing about the thousands of emotions... about the thousands of ways that energy could be in motion... and when I began to realize... in the safety of a small group of men... how dusty my inner landscape had been... I grieved ... and wept... perhaps as Mary did... but when we express our grief well... we express something true to God...

Ayanna continues... but there is a resurrection that comes of grief... the one who grieves is them self resurrected... as someone new... with a new understanding of themselves and of God... Mary's turning point comes when she tearfully describes how Jesus... her loved one... her hoped-for one... is not only dead but missing... utterly gone... and then God calls her by name... revealing that the one she thought she lost was right in front of her... she brings her tears to the tomb and leaves celebrating new life... and Mary goes... and says... *I have seen the Lord*... that is Mary's final inner reality...

In western culture... we don't grieve well... we think it makes us look weak... our culture wants us to get on with things... grieving takes too long... and by God there's work to do... in the west... in some ways... we're like Nicodemus... we may have something we need to give up... something to lose... by following Jesus... but what we gain... goes beyond what we thought possible...

Perhaps some of you have experienced that... those of you who have two or more children... if you have two children... when your first child was born... you were likely

overwhelmed with how much you loved her or him... you didn't know that much love existed anywhere inside you... and sometimes you thought it might make you burst... and then... when that second child came along... you may have wondered whether there'd be enough love for both of them... but it was already in you... like a spring of water gushing up to eternal life... because the truth is... that love has no limits... and when my emotional landscape began to expand... and new emotional waters... flowed into me... the dryness of Lent ended... and I was re-born...

Bp. Satterlee wrote... we think that Easter is about Jesus... but perhaps Easter is really about us... perhaps Easter is the story of disciples like us... who languish in misunderstanding and doubt... disciples who betray Jesus... resort to violence... stand with Jesus' enemies... and who deny that we know him... disciples who fail or refuse to grasp that God's glory is to be found on the cross... disciples who were there on that first Easter and who are with us... even in us... as we celebrate Easter today... left to ourselves... Mary and Peter... and you and I... will not survive in the dark and hostile world... and so the God of Jesus does something to look after us and make us holy... God raises Jesus from the dead...

I've said before... that Jesus turned resurrection from a historical event... into an eternal state of being... that's available to us in each and every moment... for a healed and new life... Jesus didn't die and rise again so we could remain small... the abundant life that Jesus gives... has no boundaries... two weeks ago... Jesus called Lazarus to come out of his tomb... today we are all called out... called out to eternal life...

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