

Happy Easter everybody. We have been journeying through a rather difficult Lenten season these last several weeks, but we've made it to the end of Lent. We've made it to Easter Sunday! He is risen! He is risen indeed! I recognize that this day, as joyful as it is supposed to be, is also difficult for many of us. It is a day of joy and celebration mixed with sorrow and loss. We are rejoicing that Jesus has risen from the dead. We are also mourning and grieving the loss of life, the loss of our freedom of movement, the loss of being able to be physically in Church this morning. It is, in a lot of ways, similar to the first Easter all those years ago. We too are struggling with feeling anxious, sad, grief, loss, mixed with moments of joy, happiness, and love. I think that Easter is the perfect time for us to name all that we are feeling as we gather together today to worship the risen Christ.

I struggled to figure out what to preach on this morning. I didn't know what to preach about because everything is so different right now. Every year, as I begin working on my sermon for Easter, I always dream about running into the sanctuary, loudly proclaiming, "I have seen the Lord!" and then sitting down, that being my entire sermon. But as I am sure you all want some more, so I shall try my best.

Jesus' resurrection on that first Easter Sunday was so transformative and life changing for, not only the disciples, but all of creation. What occurred in those early hours of the morning in the tomb would forever change the world. In today's passage, John, the Gospel writer is taking us on a journey together from darkness to light. We start our journey with the darkness of Good Friday. We then move to the darkness of the early morning hours in the empty tomb where the disciples and Mary are struggling to see what is going on. Then we arrive at the moment of ecstatic joy of seeing the great light of the Risen Christ in the garden. All of creation has been set free from the chains of death in this moment of resurrection. The tomb is emptied and the light of the resurrected Jesus is poured out on the world.

The Gospel writers, all of them including John, are silent on what happens before Mary's arrival in the pre-dawn hours at the tomb. We never actually learn what occurred in the moment of resurrection in the tomb. We don't know if there was a flash of light and a loud bang. We don't know if Jesus sits up. We don't know what happened in the moment of resurrection. As Debie Thomas writes on her blog, "Journey with Jesus,"

"The fact is, the resurrection happened in total darkness. Sometime in the predawn hours of that Sunday morning, a great mystery transpired in secret. No sunlight illuminated the event. No human being witnessed it. And even now, two thousand years later, no human narrative can contain it. It exceeds all of our attempts to pin it down, because it's a mystery known only to God. Whatever the resurrection was and is, its fullness lies in holy darkness, shielded from our eyes. All we can know is that somehow, in an ancient tomb on a starry night, God worked in secret to bring life out of death. Somehow, from the heart of loss and misery, God enacted salvation."

I love that there is still mystery surrounding one of the most consequential moments in human history. There were no cameras or iPhones or Facebook Live feeds to capture Jesus' resurrection. It happened and that's all we need to know. I love Debie Thomas' line I just read, "All we can know is that somehow, in an ancient tomb on a starry night, God worked in secret to bring life out of death." That is the great mystery of faith.

Right now, it can feel like we are still waiting in the pre-dawn hours before Mary's encounter with the risen Christ. We are anxious and scared. We don't know what is going on. Everything is different and we are grieving hard. It's ok for you to be feeling grief and loss on Easter morning. We know that Mary and the disciples were feeling grief too. We long to feel the comforting light that comes from being in Jesus' presence. Here's the thing, though. The Risen Jesus is with us in the empty tombs and in the gardens when we think that we are all alone, crying in the darkness. We might not recognize him because it's still dark outside and our eyes are full of tears. Jesus is with us, comforting us in our grief and our pain and our loneliness. Debie Thomas, continuing in her blog "Journey with Jesus", writes, "Jesus comes in the darkness, and sometimes it takes a long time to recognize him. He doesn't look the way I expect him to look. He doesn't let me cling to my old ideas. He disappears again just as I grab hold of him. But he comes, he calls my name, and in that instant, I recognize both myself and him." We are not alone now just as Mary wasn't alone on that first Easter morning.

I don't know what is going to happen over the next few weeks as we continue to journey through this period of isolation. I wish I knew when all of this was going to be over. I imagine that is how the disciples felt too. And I know that in this time, even though we may be grieving and lonely and scared and anxious, Jesus has risen from the grave and stands by us, calling our names, transforming the darkness of our lives into light. He is calling your name. Do you hear it? Get up and go proclaim to all the world...six feet apart in groups of 10 or less, that "I have seen the Lord." That is the Gospel message. This is the good news for us in this time. Thanks be God. Amen.