

Why Are You Weeping?
Easter Sunrise April 1, 2018

Text: *John 20: 1, 11-18a*

“Why are you weeping?” the angels ask Mary. And she answers with the facts – because they have taken away my Lord and I do not know where they have put him. But it seems the answer isn’t good enough, because Jesus asks her the same question in his guise as the gardener. He’s standing right there, so he’s obviously heard her first answer. But he asks again, “Why are you weeping?” This time she doesn’t bother answering at all, because she thinks this man is only a gardener. She moves right past his question to what she wants to know: What have you done with Jesus’ body?

But what would have happened instead if she had taken the time to answer his question? What would have happened if she had pondered why she was weeping? She would have had to let herself move beyond her puzzlement at the empty tomb and delve into grief – the grief of the death of her teacher, the grief of the death of her hopes, the grief of the death of her community of followers, now dispersed and in hiding. But opening herself to that grief would be painful, and she didn’t want to deal with the pain. So she answered the angels on the surface – I guess you can’t completely ignore a question asked by angels – and ignored the gardener’s question completely.

Jesus, full of compassion as always, recognized her fragility and didn’t push her more on the question – he just said her name, letting her recognize him. But his next strange words to her get back to that grief – “don’t hold onto me” he said – let go of your image of what was and of what you hoped would be and experience the grief – let me go so that you, along with me, may experience resurrection.

Resurrection isn’t just handed to us. As Jesus had to die and spend three days in the tomb before rising anew, so in our lives we have to let the darkness cover us and sit over us before we walk in new light. But as the sun comes up each morning, as the tide turns now to come back to the shore, so the power of resurrection will come to us. “Weeping may endure for a night,” the psalm says, “but joy comes in the morning.”

I believe in resurrection because I have seen it in so many lives and experienced it in my own. I believe in resurrection because I have heard your stories- maybe not you standing here, but people like you – and I know they are your stories too. So:

I believe in resurrection because I have seen you acknowledge your depression, go down into its depths, and come up changed and renewed.

I believe in resurrection because I have seen you face pasts of neglect and abuse and receive new life.

I believe in resurrection because I have heard of your struggles with addiction and how you have come through to sobriety.

I believe in resurrection because I have seen you determined not to repeat your own childhoods in your children's lives.

I believe in resurrection because I have heard your stories of loss: the loss of a parent, the loss of a child, the loss of a husband, wife, sister, friend, and have seen you transform the pain into care for others.

I believe in resurrection because I have seen you transform life-threatening illness into opportunity for greater life.

I believe in resurrection because I have heard of times when you were betrayed, and yet seen you give your trust again.

I believe in resurrection because I have heard in so many ways how you opened yourselves to death that you might receive life and how, when you did that, you found yourselves strengthened by a strength greater than your own.

I believe in resurrection because over and over I have heard how that strength was working with you, through you, and through other people, that you might transform your brokenness into wholeness.

I believe in resurrection because I have seen in my own life and in yours that after every death does come new life.

So “why do you weep?” The question comes to us as well as Mary. We weep because of the pains, the sorrows, the fears, we must let close over us if we are to go from death to life. We weep for feeling them. But as we weep now, we must trust that at some point – in three days, in three months, in three years, we will weep for joy as well. We will weep for the joy of recognizing Jesus in those who accompany us. We will weep for the joy of finding ourselves standing again in a garden or by the seashore, in the sunlight of a new day. We will weep for the joy of having “eastered.” We weep for joy because we too may say, “I have seen the Lord.”