

“Easter?”

Acts 10:34-43; Colossians 3:1-4;
John 20:1-18

Easter Sunday, April 12, 2020
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As we come this morning, we come with many expectations for this day. We come, remembering how it is to be a day of celebration, and yet, we may wonder, how do we celebrate this day? As we come, I wonder what we are looking for? What are we looking for as we gather in worship, whether in homes or here in the sanctuary? What are we looking for this day?

As Mary was going to the tomb early that morning, we know what she was looking for. She was looking for a tomb that had a stone blocking the entrance. Perhaps she was going, as it suggests in another gospel, to check and make sure all the funeral arrangements had happened, the care for the body had taken place. Maybe she was going simply to grieve. What was she looking for? She was looking, I think, for a place to grieve, a way to carry out her love for the one who was gone, for her Lord. She expected that he was dead. Somehow the hopes that she had had were dashed.

Do we ever experience those moments when the hopes we had were dashed? In simple ways, the hopes I had for April certainly have been dashed. I didn't expect to spend so much of my April figuring out how to do services online. My hopes of having a joyful gathering in the sanctuary where we could worship together and having fellowship together around Easter brunch were dashed. I come to this Easter, in some ways, like Mary. My expectations have been changed and I'm wondering what it means.

When Mary found the empty tomb, she wondered what it meant. She simply assumed that it was the result of somebody who had come and taken Jesus' body. How easy it is to assume that, when our hopes are dashed, somebody has done this *to me*. I look for the one to blame. How easy it is to blame. Mary doesn't know who to blame. Her real focus is on finding Jesus' body, wondering where he is, thinking he had died.

Often, I think of times where I think a particular dream has died. Life has changed, and what do I do?

When she ran back to tell the disciples, she ran back in distress. She was distraught, wondering what now? Another thing. She had been through the

crucifixion. She had been through the death. She had been through the way that her dreams had been taken apart by that death, and now she comes to yet another disappointment. She doesn't understand how God is at work in this. She wonders what she should do. So, she runs back to the disciples.

Isn't that what we do? We find those we care about. We go to them. We try to explain to them why we might be in despair, why we might be distraught, what our distress is about. We hope that in the telling we might find some comfort. Maybe our friends will be able to guide us, explain what is going on, or console us.

There isn't a whole lot of consoling, in this particular passage, from her friends. They simply run off to go see for themselves. At least that's the way it seems from this particular passage. And Mary must head back to the tomb herself, for soon she shows up again. Isn't that how it is—we revisit our disappointments? Wonder about our distress? As she returns, the angels ask her why she is crying, what she is looking for.

In my own distress, in our distress, in most things that cause us grief, have we been asked why we are crying? Sometimes it feels a little as if the person is not paying attention to what's going on. In this case, there's a hint that she doesn't understand Jesus' question to her, "Why are you crying?" In the midst of her distress and despair, Jesus is asking her, "Who is it that you are looking for?"

Perhaps that's the question we come to this day with: Who is it we are looking for? What are we looking for? Are we looking for a solution to the pandemic that is around us? Are we looking for one who can solve all our problems? What or who are we looking for? It feels to me that it often takes God acting in some way to bring me out of that distress, to help me see anew, to see differently, to reshape my understanding.

Jesus does that for Mary. He calls her name. He invites her to see anew, to recognize that he is there, that God is still at work. The best humankind could do to kill him off, to get rid of the one who brought grace and love, the one who invited us to be his followers, to do the common good, to find the new life he offered, and to live into the everlasting life that he would give—the best humankind could do was not enough to make him disappear, to overcome his message.

When we ask who we are looking for, we can say we are looking for Jesus Christ. We are looking for the love of God that has come among us. We are looking for the grace and goodness of God that enters into our lives through God

coming to us. We are looking for that which the world cannot kill off. We are looking for the one that has overcome death. We are looking for the one that is alive and active and with us. We are looking for the one we can reenact, we can follow.

We were made aware of a college student this week who was really uncertain of where her next meal was coming from. She was distraught and uncertain. She had found the gift of aid had been given, and she was thankful. We were able to give. I wonder if in that moment, in that giving, there was a sense of resurrection, a sense that her name was known. I know that in those times when somebody has done that for me, has come into my distress and enabled me to see goodness again, to see grace again, there is a moment of resurrection. And who are we looking for? We are looking for the one who shows the very grace and goodness of God. The one who has defeated death, who has taken our sin away. The one who knows us, cares for us, values us. The one who gives us life.

It is what this day is about. It is the transformation from empty tomb, and blame, and denial, into a thing of joy and hope. In the midst of distress, in the midst of our distraught feelings, in the midst of despair, in the midst of hope gone awry—rebirth—a renewal, a resurrection. God is not gone. God is present. God engages us again.

I believe that God is there for each of us, that God calls our name, that God invites us to know that in the midst of our hopelessness there is hope, and that in the midst of this time God is with us. Resurrection is real. New life is coming. We can live into that resurrection and know that the love of God is such that nothing can get between us. That the love of God is such that *nothing* can come between us. “Neither life nor death, nor anything else in all creation,” Paul writes in Romans, “can come between us and the love of God.”

Resurrection is that reminder. Resurrection is that moment of celebration in realizing that it is real. God’s love is real, and we can express it. In expressing God’s love, we express that resurrection. We express it in caring for each other, in picking each other up, in encouraging each other, in loving each other even as he has loved us. We have an everlasting hope because nothing can come between us and the love of God, not anything in all creation. We have the resurrection of Christ, and in the resurrection he invites us to life anew, life everlasting.

He is risen! He is risen indeed! Amen.