

Christ is Risen!

Will you please pray with me: Holy God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be faithful and pleasing unto you, for you are our rock and our salvation. Amen.

It was early Sunday morning, so early that it was still dark. Mary moved slowly toward the tomb of her beloved Jesus. I imagine that Mary was still in shock, as she took oil to anoint his body, quietly weeping. It had all happened so fast—one day Jesus was making a triumphant entry into to Jerusalem, and a few days later, he was gone.

Mary surely had carried a lot of negative views of the world by that point. I would imagine that she saw it as a harsh, cruel place, with leaders and social structures that oppressed the poor, minorities, and women. I would imagine that she felt powerless, often sad and afraid. I would imagine that the betrayal of Judas, Peter, and her own religious leaders shocked her to her core, maybe causing her to feel like no one was trustworthy. These are stones she carried with her to the tomb that day.

But what she found at the tomb was not what she had been expecting at all. Not only was the tomb empty, but Jesus greeted her outside of it! He had done what he had promised and defeated death! As the prophet Isaiah foretold:

And he will destroy on this mountain
the shroud that is cast over all peoples,

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the sheet that is spread over all nations;
he will swallow up death forever.

Then the Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from all faces,
and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the
earth,
for the LORD has spoken.

And at that moment, Mary had to leave a lot of her understandings of life behind. They were like stones that had weighed her down, but they needed to be buried in that tomb. Jesus had defeated death and evil, had returned to us and, thus, transformed everything!

This is one of the most important messages of Easter: Death, evil, heartache—they all have been transformed by Jesus into something wondrous—into life and love.

I wonder what this means to you, to us, in this world that we live in? How does knowing that death and evil have been overcome and transformed affect us, in this time of Covid and in this place? How does it transform the stone that you left behind on the tomb in our garden?

In an article published last week in Working Preacher, Rev. Dr. Kathryn Schifferdecker, draws our attention to important words from the lectionary's New Testament reading for today from 1

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Corinthians. She says, “because Jesus has risen from the dead, because we too shall be resurrected, because death has been swallowed up in victory, [Paul says] ‘Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain’ (1 Corinthians 15:58).”

After quoting Paul, she goes on to say, “I don’t know about you, but this is a word of encouragement to me. Because sometimes it feels like my labor is in vain. Sometimes it feels like what I’m doing is ephemeral, and not having much of an effect in a world with overwhelming problems.” But the resurrection story transforms our fears, our losses, our burdens, because it shows us that our labor is not in vain. God is currently working in our world to make us whole and, even when we die and it seems that all is lost and over, it is not! God will bring us to true peace, to true justice, to true wholeness as we are resurrected through Jesus Christ.

Jesus’ resurrection transformed Mary’s understanding of the stones she carried, and that transformed her understanding of her calling. Before this moment, she had followed Jesus, listening to his teachings, and helping to care for him when his burdens grew too heavy, but she did it while carrying her own frightening version of the world. Now that vision had changed. If the evil powers of the world could not vanquish God, if Jesus had returned, if even death

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was not permanent, then that changed her perception of the world from one that was full of weeping, to one that was full of joy. And when joy is the filter through which you see the world, well, that changes everything—the way you feel, the way you act, even the stones that you carry. And so her own ministry changed. She left the tomb, running to spread this message of hope and healing to the other disciples and to her friends. And, eventually, together they spread this resurrection message to the world.

So as you go out into the world today, go out transformed, remembering that we are all people of the resurrection. Let the joy of this good news color your perception of the world and of all that you carry, so that through you, God can bring wholeness and healing to those who feel broken by loss and despair. Christ is risen! Alleluia, Amen!