

ὁ λόγος παρακλήσεως: Easter 1-C (17 April 2022)

St. Thomas', Glassboro

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Collect

O God, who for our redemption gave your only-begotten Son to the death of the cross, and by his glorious resurrection delivered us from the power of our enemy: Grant us so to die daily to sin, that we may evermore live with him in the joy of his resurrection; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Acts 10:34-43, Psalm 118:1-2,14-24, 1 Corinthians 15:19-26, John 20:1-18

I. Darkness

Even the good news starts in darkness. Unknowing. Obscurity. Twilight. There's a chill in the air. The setting is in a cemetery, with tombs and tombstones all around. And the only thing worse than a tomb with a body in it is a tomb that's supposed to have a body in it but is empty instead. In John's account we find only Mary Magdalene who has come to be near the Lord she loves. But he is gone: just one more foul indignity on top of a string of others, perpetrated by those who felt threatened by Jesus. or so she thinks. Mary Magdalene feels sorrow, frustration, probably anger. She also feels helpless. Once more she needs to navigate a man's world in order to find justice, so she recruits two of the male disciples to help her to resolve this latest outrage.

It turns out, the apostles were useless. They came running, sure enough, like boys having a footrace. One was scared to enter the tomb, and the other barged right in. They saw the clothes of death left behind, but had no idea what to make of it. We're told they "believed," but believed what? That Jesus' body had been taken, as Mary told them? Our Gospel tells us that "as yet they did not understand the scripture, that Jesus must rise from the dead." But at least that's the clue you and I have been waiting for.

II. Looking for something

There are some things that Jesus offered to Mary Magdalene, to all of his disciples, that they desperately needed. Jesus brought them meaning and purpose. He gave them acknowledgement and acceptance. Jesus brought them into community and relationship. Jesus gave them direction and instruction in genuine goodness. Perhaps most importantly, Jesus offered, and offers, each of his disciples affirmation and authentic belovedness. Mary Magdalene came to the tomb that day because she was not willing to let go of those things.

These are some of the values, the realities, embodied by the community of Jesus. These are the things that disciples like Mary Magdalene, Peter, and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, found with Jesus. These gifts and values are what we, the church, the body of Christ, continue to offer to one another and to the entire world around us. This is our purpose, our work, our mission, our grace, and our joyful experience.

When was the last time you were looking for something with the kind of desperation Mary feels in our Gospel today? A time when you were waiting for some news, afraid it would be bad, desperately hoping for something good? Have you ever been afraid to accept good news when you found it, just terrified that it can't be true, that you will be disappointed? Have you ever been slow to accept that your search is over?

III. Believing

Today we get to read these scriptures with nearly 2000 years of history. We can laugh at the clumsy disciples who seem so clueless. But the fact of resuscitation from the dead is not so foreign to us. We hear this story told every Easter. We hear it play out occasionally on operating tables. We can believe without too much difficulty, just as Peter and the other disciples believed, that the tomb was empty.

But can we believe in the gifts Jesus offers to us? Do we have eyes to see and ears to hear these gifts brought to us through Jesus' body, the Church? Do we believe not just in a resuscitation, but in the transformative, life-changing power of the Resurrection? Do we believe enough to be changed by it? Is that change evident in the way it shapes our lives from day to day?

IV. Mary Patient

The other disciples came by, said, "huh?" and went back home. And they missed out.

But Mary was patient. She stood there, weeping. Contemplating. Praying wordlessly. Remaining still and open and receptive, wondering what God might be doing. In doing so she encountered messengers from God who helped to her to continue to engage the questions. Then she encountered Jesus himself. She didn't even recognize him at first. But because of her patient, her persistence, because she gave herself time and space for that encounter, she came to recognize Jesus' presence.

In Mary we see the beginning of the church. According to John's Gospel, she was the first evangelist, the first to proclaim, "I have seen the Lord" and to bring news of the Resurrection into the world.

The church is a community of the Resurrection. We are a people learning from Mary Magdalene: patience, receptivity, contemplation, and prayer. We are learning to see Jesus, to receive his gifts of acceptance, direction, community, and belovedness. We are learning to encounter the power of the Resurrection in our own lives so that we, too, may be changed just as Jesus was.

You, too, are invited to join us as we are learning to say, "Alleluia, Christ is risen!"

The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Amen.