

Easter, March 31, 2013

He is Risen!

John 20:11-18

How many of you were afraid of the dark when you were young? How many of you are STILL afraid of the dark? When you experienced these fears as a child, what was it that calmed those fears?

You could say it was simply when someone turned on the light, but it's probably more than that. The relief came when your mom or dad came in and said, "it's ok. I'm here!" Maybe they came in and snuggled you and gave you a kiss... Or you simply fell asleep and woke up to light and the smells of mom making breakfast in the kitchen... Whatever the case, light changes everything!

And that's really what we're celebrating this morning. Jesus is the light of the world, the light that shines in the darkness! And whereas on Good Friday, when Jesus was on the cross it looked like that light was forever put out, instead, Jesus said "IT IS FINISHED" to the darkness.

And in order to appreciate the light that shines in the darkness, we have to recognize the awful pit of the darkness.

That's the state Mary experienced that first Easter morning.

In the passage we just read from John's gospel, John says that **Mary walked to the tomb so early in the morning it was still dark.** She looked at that tomb (probably squinted to make sure she was seeing right) and lo and behold the stone was rolled away.

My first thought is, How exciting! Mary's first thought was, How terrible!

Why the different responses? We have to remember 2 things. #1) I/We know the rest of the story and Mary did not, at this point. #2, Mary was in the dark.

Listen again to the first verse of our passage. "Early on the first day of the week, WHILE IT WAS STILL DARK, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance." **Mary was in the dark.**

What does the morning, what does the day, your life, look like when you are surrounded by darkness?

By bad news, disappointment, confusion? That's what was going on with Mary that morning.

The last time Mary saw Jesus, he was nailed to that cross, with two criminals by his side. He was whipped and beaten, laughed at, suffered and died... I'm sure those memories haunted Mary when she walked to the tomb that morning. **She was surrounded by literal darkness and you know she FELT and EXPERIENCED that darkness deep within.** And think about it-- she was going to the darkest place of all, the tomb, which she of course thought, was empty.

So she was in the dark. She was feeling the pit of darkness inside. And then imagine her walking toward the darkest, most gloomy place she could go, the empty tomb.

I wonder if you've experienced that kind of darkness. When everything around you, (everything within you!) is dark and gloomy. Perhaps everything you built your hopes on, your life upon, has suddenly been taken away?... There's an unexpected loss. A tremendous disappointment catches you off guard. It's a hard place to be. It's really hard to make sense of things when you're in the dark. When you feel lost and alone, overwhelmed.

That experience of feeling enveloped by the darkness affects our ability to function well. Every Sunday morning when I leave the house to drive to St. Maries I begin my morning in the dark. I get ready in the dark because I don't want to wake anyone up. You know what happens to me when I try to navigate my morning in the dark? I stumble over the books I left on the floor the night before. It takes me twice as long to find an outfit and I get close to leaving the house with two different shoes on. If I didn't really pay attention and eventually turn on some lights, I'd arrive here each Sunday morning in shambles!

What were the affects of the darkness on Mary, Peter and John's that Easter morning? And let's be clear, the source of their darkness was that Jesus was gone. So I guess I'm asking, **WHAT HAPPENS, WHAT ARE THE RAMIFICATIONS, WHEN JESUS GOES MISSING?** I noticed 3 things happened w/ Mary, John and Peter.

1) There were misunderstandings and everyone jumped to conclusions. 2) People started running around all over the place. 3) It took a while for people to recognize Jesus in their midst.

And I want to expand on that, but first...Have you ever noticed that this is what happens when Jesus is missing... from our conversations, from our relationships and from the circumstances of our lives.

When we forget Jesus, when we forget his truth and his way WE'RE likely to misunderstand and jump to conclusions about what's really going on.

We're likely to start running around or running away from the problem... We are likely to forget that Jesus is there with us and for us after all.

How did this happen with Mary, Peter and John?

1) Amidst the darkness, Mary jumped to conclusions.

Mary looked at the tomb, the stone rolled away, and thought she knew the whole story.

She jumped to conclusions. They've took him!" she thought. She didn't take a closer look, she didn't check for evidence, she just RAN. Back to the disciples.

But thank goodness, there's more to the story... **The truth of Easter is that there's always more to the story!)**

2nd thing they did as a result of being overcome by the darkness-- Everybody started running!

Mary ran to the disciples before really knowing what happened. John and Peter both ran back to the tomb but you get the sense that they really hadn't thought this whole thing through, like, **WHAT ARE WE SUPPOSED TO DO WHEN WE GET THERE?** Because John got there first but stopped at the entrance. Peter ran slower, more cautiously?, yet barged in when he got there...

But, after all that running they still didn't find Jesus right away.

3rd thing that happened because of the darkness (I believe) It took a while for

everybody to recognize Jesus.

We know this happened to Mary, when she thought Jesus was the gardener, but consider this...

When Peter and John arrived at the tomb, both of them entered. All they saw were the cloths that wrapped Jesus' body and head. There were no angels. There was no Jesus who looked like the gardener! But a few moments later, when Mary entered, she saw 2 angels and Jesus. What happened? **Why didn't the men see what Mary saw?**

Did Jesus and the angels slip out when the men were there but decide to pop in exclusively for Mary? Or were Jesus and the angels there all along but Peter and John were so focused on the grave clothes that they missed him? The wonderful thing is, amidst the darkness they were feeling, you can tell the light was beginning to shine on in. John said he saw the grave clothes and believed.

I want to stop right here and cut the disciples some slack. Who among us would've expected Jesus to show up? Even though Jesus tried to tell the disciples about it early on, who would've believed Jesus would come back from the dead? It was hard enough for everyone to believe he was going to die in the first place.

We wouldn't have believed it either.

Have you heard the saying, there are two things we can be certain of in life. Change and death. Change is inevitable-- things never stay the same. And Death-- as hard as it is to grasp, we are all going to die.

Out of all the things that change in life, death is the one thing we can be sure of. If the rules around death change, what are we to do with that?

Listen to how David Lose explains it.

Resurrection isn't simply a claim that Jesus' body was resuscitated; it's the claim that God entered the stage of human history in order to create an *entirely new reality* all together. Which, quite frankly, can be frightening. If the dead don't stay dead, what can you count on? Resurrection, seen this way, breaks all the rules, and while most of us will admit that the old rules aren't perfect – and sometimes are downright awful --at least we *know* them. They are predictable, a known quantity, and in this sense comforting. And resurrection upsets all of that.

Resurrection, in other words, throws off the balance, upsets the apple cart, and generally turns our neat and orderly lives totally out of whack. ***Which is why I think that if you don't find resurrection at least a little hard to believe, you probably aren't taking it very seriously!*** And, truth be told, I suspect that's where most of us lie. We've heard the story of resurrection so often it hardly makes us blink, let alone shake with wonder and surprise. Which is rather sad, when you think about it, because this promise, as difficult as it may be to believe initially, is huge, and when it sinks in and lays hold of you, absolutely everything looks a little different.

Yes, after the resurrection, everything looked, everything WAS different. Which was both wonderful and frightening at the same time.

Jesus' resurrection is wonderful because God's light overcame the darkness! Victory triumphed over tragedy! Jesus conquered the grave.

It's wonderful because Jesus called Mary by name and she recognized him.
It's wonderful because Mary got to return to the disciples with the good news, "I have seen the Lord!" which changed the course of human history forever.

The FRIGHTENING part is that nothing is the same. Nothing goes back to the same old, for the disciples or for us here TODAY.

Which leads me to the bittersweet part of the story. It's a difficult part that is often hard to understand. (Truth be told I don't really like this part of the story!)

It's when Jesus says, "Mary!" And Mary is overjoyed and says, "Rabouni!" and you know she just hugs him with all she's got.

At this point I really want the movie music to come on and for Jesus to hug her back and say, "Find the others and tell them I'm back. Let's all get out of here and go home!"

But Jesus didn't say that. Instead, he said, "Don't hold on to me."

Yikes! What harsh words! Or at least they seem that way. **Because of course that's the only thing Mary wanted to do.** To cling to Jesus and say "You are not getting out of my sight. Stay right there! Hold it! Don't move! I've got you where I want you. With me forever."

Of course, with Jesus alive, everyone must've wanted things to go back to the way they were⁰⁰ Jesus teaching the multitudes on the hillside. Healings, miracles, but most of all Jesus with them to comfort and lead them, you know, like he used to do before all the crazyness after Palm Sunday...

You know that Mary clung to Jesus so tightly because she wanted that moment to last forever. But Jesus doesn't come on our terms, he calls us to say yes to his terms. Which are expressed in Rev. 21. **Jesus said, Behold, I am making all things new!** Remember Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 5: **if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!**

We worship a God on the move! And He's taking us with him(!), leaving behind the things of the past where there is darkness, sin and death. God leads us on to new life in Christ. A life we are called to give away.

Mary gets that. She experiences the joy in letting go of her dreams, wants and desires (holding onto Jesus, embracing him on her own terms) and did what God put it on her heart to do: to share the good news with the disciples, "I have seen the Lord!"

Have you encountered the risen Christ in your own life? May we be compelled to share and live out the amazing truth, Christ is risen! He is risen indeed.