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St. John's Episcopal Church
16th April 2017
Easter Morning (A) (Matthew)

Alleluia!

Wake up!

This. Is. Important. News, People!

Christ has arisen!

Alleluia!

Up until that point, Mary was undoubtedly confused. Barbara Brown Taylor reminds us that "Resurrection is entirely unnatural. When a human being goes into the ground, that is that.... You say good-bye. You pay your respects and you go on with your life as best you can, knowing that the only place springtime happens in a cemetery is *on* the graves, not in them...." (*Home by Another Way*).

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary are lost. They'd planned to spend the day honoring Jesus by the loving act of anointing his lifeless body, and now their whole plan is thrown off: There's no body to anoint! It's gone!

They are so rattled that they don't even understand until "Suddenly Jesus met them and said, 'Greetings.'" And then they knew.

And Jesus commissions them to go tell the men. The two women: Apostles to the apostles. The first bearers of the good news that Jesus is the Christ, resurrected, risen, alive!

I think it's important to remember that it was two women, not Simon Peter or the disciple whom Jesus loved, whoever that was, it was Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, women, to whom he first appeared. And it was the women, not Simon Peter or the other one, who went back to the small community and said, "We have seen the Lord." Mary and Mary, outsiders because of their gender. Mary and Mary, the first apostles, the first bearers of the Good News, the first who "got it" – they understood. They understood. And Jesus, friend of those on the margins of society, Jesus has told *them* to tell the others.

So what.

Well, here's what I think.

First, I do believe that Christ is arisen. I don't believe it as a fact, because I can't prove it, but I believe it as a truth. I do believe that in God's great mystery God has the power to raise the Son of all humankind from the dead. And I do believe that God did just that.

Second, I believe it is good news.

I believe this powerful resurrection is good news to all people who have suffered, are suffering, will suffer. People who are sick, people who are homeless, people who are dying,

people who are mourning, people who every day face the violence of oppressors and tyrants, wars and injustices, famine and deep poverty.

I believe that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is this good news: *That evil will not win.* That goodness – love, mercy, compassion – goodness, God’s great goodness, will win.

It is the good news of hope.

I think that the message of today’s particular Gospel is that we, too, might not recognize Jesus – until we realize that he calls us each by name. “Wayne,” he says. “Nancy.” “Martha.” “David.”

He calls us each by name and sends us out to tell the others. To proclaim that death will not win. That death is not the final word –

...that suffering must end, that poverty must be overcome, that sickness and corruption and violence is not the legacy to leave to our children and that we have the power to heal and the power to lift up the lowly and cast down the mighty from their thrones.

The good news is that *God’s justice will prevail.*

We live in a very broken world. The famine in South Sudan: Two hundred ninety thousand people facing extreme hunger. A staggering number of them will die. War in the middle east: ISIS claiming more civilian casualties, America and Russia doing damn little to stop the genocide. An extraordinary number of executions scheduled to begin in Arkansas, temporarily, at least, halted by a federal judge. The “mother of all bombs,” a phrase that is certainly arrogant and inappropriate, dropped in Afghanistan. We don’t know the number of the dead. North Korea flexing its muscles by showing long-range missiles in a parade. A president who tweets bombastic commentary in the middle of the night.

Poverty, injustice, hunger, violence, misogyny, trans- and homophobia, racism, income inequality based on gender...

I could, of course, go on.

And yet... There is no lack of hope. Not for me, anyway. Doctors Without Borders continue to serve the poorest, the most wretched of the world – refugees, migrants, people fleeing war they didn’t start. That judge I spoke of, who suggested that the drug to be used for executions could cause cruel pain before death. Resistance movements worldwide – by women, first, who again led the way, by scientists, by peace-loving Christians, Moslems, Buddhists, and people of no religious persuasion who are committed to diplomacy before violence. Doctors right here in Mt. Pleasant who offer much-needed health care regardless of the patient’s ability to pay. The staff and volunteers of Restoration House, offering overnight shelter and counseling to our homeless brothers and sisters, respecting their dignity and their humanity.

Yes, there are moments of hope even while I read the New York Times.

When I’m at my worst I fail to see the resurrected Christ in the Other. I fail to recognize the dignity of every human being. I fail to live into my Baptismal Covenant. And I repent: I tell God – and you – that I am truly sorry, and I move on, trying to love my neighbor as myself.

And when I'm at my best, that works. When I'm at my best, when *we* are at our best, we put the neighbor first, before my own schedule, before my own desire for more *stuff*, before my need to look good.

And we will once again see Jesus. In the faces of the poor and the weak, in the voice of those who cry for peace, and in the tears of those who weep. We will see Jesus in the face of the friend and in the face of the enemy. And, as I often pray, we will speak the voice of Jesus for those who have no voice.

Jesus will call us by name. "Marylou." "Victoria." "Tim." "Matthew."

And we will see the risen Christ.

Alleluia!

God wins!