

Easter Day B (4/1/2018)

Acts 10:34-43

Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Mark 16:1-8

By the death and burial of Jesus, God has made holy the resting places of all God's people. But by his resurrection, God has defied everything we think we know about death. Where he was laid no longer matters, but only where he is now and where he is leading us.

On Memorial Day growing up, my family would pack into our car, pick my grandmother up at her apartment, and drive the forty-five miles north from Eugene to Lebanon, Oregon, to visit my grandfather's grave. He died unexpectedly at a young age, and my grandmother lived the rest of her life as a widow. She was a permanent fixture in my young life, but she never spoke about my grandfather, his untimely death, or her memories of him. So, my only opportunity to connect with grandpa was on that last Monday in May each year. Arriving at the cemetery, we would walk quietly to his resting place and pay our respects. I remember the rows and rows of graves, washed in sunlight and dotted with flowers and flags. And, I remember wandering with my sister to the edge of the cemetery where there was a bridge over a little creek running by. She and I would stand listening to the gurgling water for a short time before heading back to our car for the trip home. Grandma died in 2015, and she now rests with grandpa in that cemetery in Lebanon.

Maybe you have a similar story, a tradition of returning to a loved one's burial place. Or, maybe you can picture that place in your mind, even if you don't visit there regularly. One of the great privileges of my work is accompanying people at the burial of a family member or friend. "Holy God, holy and powerful," I pray at the

graveside or the vault, “by the death and burial of Jesus your anointed, you have destroyed the power of death and made holy the resting places of all your people. Keep our [loved one], who we now lay to rest, in the company of all your saints.”¹

Something compels us to mark and bless the place where the deceased lies. And, that place often draws loved ones back – to sit with them, to relate to them, to remember them.

Jesus’ resting place is no exception. All of his male disciples scattered in the wake of his arrest, abandoning him to public humiliation and a painful death. But, recall that several women stood at a distance on Good Friday afternoon, cautiously watching the tragedy of the crucifixion unfold. These same women saw the place where Jesus’ body was laid. And, early on Sunday morning, the trauma of the cross still painfully fresh, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome creep through the predawn shadows to visit the tomb at sunrise.

The crucifixion exemplifies all our inhumanity, the violence and carelessness that so often characterizes human relations. Jesus has suffered and died as a result of it, yet the women have borne witness to it, and they are still reeling from the shock. With broken hearts and dreams, they are nevertheless drawn back to his burial place, determined to sit with him, to relate to him, to remember him. For everyone else, the story is already over. But, the women need to see Jesus again at least once, despite his being bloodied and broken. And by returning to him, they re-expose themselves to all the suffering the crucifixion

¹ *Evangelical Lutheran Worship: Pastoral Care*, 247.

represents, taking on “the full weight of life’s intermittent but inevitable horrors,” to borrow the words of one interpreter.²

In contrast to our cheery outlook in retrospect, that first Easter morning was steeped in grief. **Everything up to the moment of their arrival at the tomb confirmed the women’s expectations for life in the world as it is: hopes will be disappointed, the innocent will suffer at the hands of the guilty, the powerful will crush the vulnerable, loved ones will inevitably be lost.**

But at the tomb, everything changes! Contrary to their expectations, the stone has already been rolled aside, and inside they find not the body of Jesus, but a radiant young figure: “Do not be alarmed,” he says, seeing the surprise on their faces; “you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. ...He is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.”

The women thought they knew where to find Jesus. He had died along with his dream for a world renewed, but at least they knew where he lay – his resting place, the place they could go to remember him.

The surprising news on Sunday morning, however, is that God has defied everything the women thought they knew about the world as it is. *This place you thought you’d find Jesus?* the mysterious messenger insists, *He is not here. God has disrupted death and released Jesus from its jaws back out into the world. And he is waiting for you there, that you might follow him again.*³

² Serene Jones, in *Feasting on the Word*, Year B, Vol. 2, 356.

³ See D. Cameron Murchison, in *Feasting on the Word*, Year B, Vol. 2, 354.

This impossible ripple in their known world sends the women fleeing with fear, which makes for a stark ending to the Gospel of Mark: “They went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement has seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.” The end! Perhaps they said nothing at first, but eventually the story got out, and **Jesus’ resurrection took on a meaning as broad as God intended it: hope springs eternal; the cruelty of the cross does not define our life together; the reign of abusive power will come to an end; and our loved ones are not lost forever.**

Christ is risen; he is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Dear church, by the death and burial of Jesus, God has made holy the resting places of all God’s people. But by his resurrection, God has defied everything we think we know about death. **Where he was laid no longer matters, but only where he is now and where he is leading us – into life abundant.⁴ Thanks be to God!**

⁴ John 10:10.