

Where we left the Savior

Hallelujah! The Lord has risen indeed! Tonight, we celebrate the joy of the resurrection. This Saturday night concludes the worship which began on Maundy Thursday. The joy would not be possible without the pain of the cross. This worship recollects the jubilation of Jesus' resurrection. We see today how Jesus was triumphantly restored to glory after having been beaten, betrayed, and denied.¹

For those who worshiped or heard about Jesus' death. The end of the story was simple to foresee: the disciples mourned after the past three years of life with Jesus. Afterwards, perhaps these faithful disciples would tell the stories to others, maybe one day it would be written down and people would hear about him. This beautiful resurrection moment happens before any of this can take place.

Instead, we have a group still within the first flush of grief. They have not anointed the body yet. The trauma of what happened: the body, the blood, and then Jesus' last breath. All of it left those watching feeling crushed. On Good Friday, the pain of the Savior is on display. Suddenly, there is an empty tomb, which causes many new fears and trepidations.

Sorrows and Fears

It is easy to relate to the two Marys: they must feel lost. They can't do anything to change their grief. In moments of tragedy, it can seem as though the situation can't get worse. And then it does.² Together, they went to just look at Jesus' tomb. In other gospels we hear about how they are going to anoint Jesus' body. In Matthew's Gospel, they want only to look at Jesus' resting place. Certainly, those who have experienced deep grief can understand that feeling. Going to a resting place is common and understandable.

Instead of a moment of peace, they find an Earthquake! Matthew is the only Gospel that shares with us this dramatic event. Matthew and John are also the only ones who provide a narrative where angels appear at the tomb. Their fear and sorrow is likely magnified by this incredible event. Instead of having a moment to grieve and feel pain they stand in fear.³

I imagine in that moment of fear and sorrow the women did not see much hope. Instead, they were further offered fear when a messenger from God appeared to them proclaiming the good news: that Christ's body was not in the tomb because he had risen from the dead! The angel said not to be afraid. The easiest way to remember this is by remembering that Christ is fully divine. He was fully human and also fully divine. This truth can give Christians hope for any obstacle to be overcome.⁴

¹ Fitzpatrick, M. (2023). <https://www.journeywithjesus.net/lectionary-essays/current-essay?id=3556>

² Wright, N.T. (2001). *Matthew for Everyone*. London: SPCK.

³Carey, G. (2023) <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/vigil-of-easter-3/commentary-on-matthew-281-10-11>

⁴ This point comes from Justin Martyr: For being sent with authority, it were not fit that it should be required to produce proof of what is said; since neither is there any proof beyond itself, which is God. For every proof is more powerful and trustworthy than that which it proves; since what is disbelieved, until proof is produced, gets credit when such proof is produced, and is recognised as being what it was stated to be...And God, the Father of the universe, who is the perfect intelligence, is the truth. And the Word, being His Son, came to us, having put on flesh, revealing both Himself and the Father, giving to us in Himself resurrection from the dead, and eternal life afterwards. Martyr, J. as Translated by Dodd, M. From Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 1. Edited by Alexander Roberts,

Once Jesus appeared to the Marys, they began to accept the Truth. Jesus can't be defeated. It is The Truth that gives Believers a new family and a new life. Those that believe in the everlasting life of Christ come to a new understanding. And in Matthew's Gospel we see the journey being taken by a group together. Yes, they each have an individual relationship with our Lord and savior. They also are communally able to come to a faith together. It is the foundation for Baptism.

Baptism

In The Episcopal Church, our faith in Christ is recognized at our Baptism. There is an inward change that acknowledges the spiritual birth which happens when someone accepts Jesus as Lord and promises to live as his disciples. Part of the Baptismal ceremony is the naming of the individual to be baptized. Tonight, we look at Abigail, Blaine, Eli, and Angelo and affirm that we will walk with them in their faith journey, to support them in their life in Christ.⁵ Tonight they are named and claimed by Jesus.⁶

In their faith journeys they will know joy and fear. They will know doubt, faith, and tears. They will have moments of faith when Jesus appears to them clearly in their lives and says, "Do not be afraid," and gives them their own mission just as he does with the Marys on their way to Galilee. Without a doubt the future for these four is bright in Christ. These children of God, Abigail, Blaine, Eli, and Angelo will need our support through the joys and fears of life with Jesus. Just as Marys went out proclaiming Christ, it is our job to raise up the baptized and proclaim the resurrection.

New Life in Christ

The Marys encounter with the risen Lord is a new beginning. They will continue to proclaim the Gospel to the disciples. Their role as the first witnesses of the resurrection can never be discounted. They endured through grief and heartache before they were able to see the Christ's Resurrection.

On Thursday, I shared the powerful story of how a priest in a large church mopped the floor of the youth ministry room, showing great love echoed by Jesus at the footwashing. Moments of love like this prepare our faith to endure the struggles along the journey of faith. As I ponder what most prepared me for the priesthood it certainly included prayer, patience, and practical learning.

Yet it really was the mentorship of lay members who took an interest in my faith. I had one person who was always by my side, eager to help organize the program, support the mission trip, and do the more mundane planning of church programs (so many menial tasks in youth ministry). There is something powerful knowing that somebody is by your side in good times and bad, through the peaks and valleys of ministry. This is the knowledge the Marys showed

James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885.) Revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight. <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0131.htm>,

⁵ The Book of Common Prayer (1979). New York: Church Publishing. p.303

⁶ The importance of naming the first witness occurs in John and the theme applies here tonight because of Baptism. For more on this see: Lewis, K.M. (2014). *Fortress Biblical Preaching Commentary: John*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

when they sustained each other in grief then went to share the news of Christ coming to his disciples. It is a knowledge every Christian has in their hearts.

Abigail, Blaine, Eli, and Angelo will learn from the clergy at this church, Fr. Roman is a superb teacher, Fr. Alvaro has a huge heart, and this church has a history of mentoring curates.

As talented as our clergy are (and humble as I am), let us never underestimate the support that comes from laity. Not only are they our most numerous leaders in the church, their personal interest in the lives of the baptized can change their lives. We all need somebody in our lives to get us through the joys and fears, to help us after disasters of epic proportions, such as the ones The Marys encountered when going to the tomb.

Tonight is the time to put aside our fears. The way we begin a new life in Christ is by giving up our old (often sinful) ways and by recognizing the miracle of the cross, Christ is Risen, and the tomb is emptied of its dead; “for Christ having risen from the dead, is become the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep.”⁷ Christ has been raised from the dead for each of us. What an amazing reason to stand together, to support each other in Christ, the newly baptized, and all on their faith journey. What a blessing, what a reason to rejoice: Alleluia!

⁷ This is the best Easter Vigil Sermon ever written. http://anglicansonline.org/special/Easter/chrysostom_easter.html