

Thankful Memorial, Chattanooga
April 16, 2017
Year A, Easter Sunday
Love got him in there, Love sends us out!
The Rev. Leyla King

Acts 10:34-43
Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24
Colossians 3:1-4
John 20:1-18

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Some people say Easter Day is all about joy surprising us in our sorrow. And that's true. When the risen Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene in John's gospel, she is weeping. She is overcome by the shock of the last three days and the grief of Jesus' death and when she comes to the tomb to begin her mourning-period, she discovers that his body is gone and her grief is wrapped in yet more loss and confusion. Right into that deep valley of sorrow comes the astounding joy of her encounter with the risen Lord. So, yes, Easter is about our sorrow being transformed into resurrection joy.

Others say Easter Day is about hope returning into a reality that seemed hopeless. And, that's true too. When Mary tells the disciples about the missing body, Peter and his friend race to the tomb. What motivation could they have for *running*, if not that Mary's announcement awoke from someplace deep within them the small shoots of hope that *maybe*, just *maybe*, what Mary says is a sign that things are not as awful as they seem, that perhaps the mercy and power of God might still win the day. So, yes, Easter is *also* about hope blooming in the hopeless places.

But, for me at least, joy and hope are *not* at the heart of Easter. Deeper than these emotions is another one, an even better one that lies at the very root of this day: love. And it's not just true of Easter, but of all the events of the past week. Indeed, love is at the very center of Jesus's whole life, his horrific death and yes, his glorious resurrection on this day.

One of my favorite country songs is called "Ol' Red." It's not *entirely* appropriate for church, so I won't share too much, but the singer tells the story of how he was serving life in prison for committing a crime of passion. He escapes from jail by engineering some more passion between the prison's tracking-dog and a female bloodhound. The point of it all is in the last words of the song. The escaped man sings: "Love got me in there and love got me out."

Now, it's a significantly different situation, but Jesus could say much the same about his tomb: Love got him in there; and love got him out.

Love got him in there because Jesus's whole life was governed and motivated by love – love of God, love of humankind, with all our sorrows and sinfulness, love for each individual whom he encountered. When Jesus met sinners and the "unclean," out of love for them he talked, ate with, and comforted them, and that shocked the authorities enough to pay closer attention to what *else* he was doing. When Jesus saw people suffering from loss or sickness, he called on the love of God to heal them, and that was a threat to the *power* of the authorities. When Jesus saw those same authorities disenfranchising the poor and outcast and misinterpreting God's law, Jesus out of love for his heavenly Father spoke against such behavior, and that made them mad. And when those in power came after him, when they tortured, beat, and crucified him, Jesus refused to meet violence with violence. Out of love for his betrayers, for the sake of God's love for all sinners, Jesus went to his death and was carried to his tomb. Love got him in there.

And Love got him out. Three days after his death, God's love overcame *all* of it – all of the power-lust and violence, all of the human striving and sinning, all of the wreckage of human life. All of *that* could not overcome God's love for God's own creatures, love which is stronger than even death itself. Christ's love brought him into direct conflict with worldly powers of greed and injustice and God's love would not, cannot and does not allow such things to have the last word. No, the love of God is yet more powerful, stronger, truer than all the kingdoms of this world and God's love brought Christ Jesus out of the tomb.

And we know that it is love's power at work this morning because of stories like the one John's gospel tells about the first Easter Day. When Jesus meets Mary in the garden, his new resurrected body is at first unrecognizable. But then he says her name. And oh what a world of tenderness, of intimacy, of mercy and sympathy and understanding, oh what a world of *love* we can hear in Jesus's "Mary!" And Mary hears it, too. She hears it and recognizes it for what it is and responds in kind, with a loving "My teacher!"

But that's not all. Jesus goes on to tell Mary: "Go to my [siblings] and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" The language he uses here is important if we are to understand what the resurrection really means – for all of us. Before his death, Jesus told his disciples, "I do not call you servants any longer... but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father."ⁱ With knowledge of the Father, the disciples were transformed from servants to friends. Now, through his resurrection, Jesus's disciples – then and now – are once again transformed, from friends to *siblings*, to brothers and sisters, *sons and daughters* of the God that Jesus, too, calls Father. "Go to my [siblings]," says Jesus, and tell them "I am ascending to my Father and *your* Father." The resurrection has brought the followers of Jesus into the intimate relationship of love between parent and children. So, at heart, you see, Easter Day is about *love*.

Today, this glorious morning, we are once again offered such astounding love through the Christ's resurrection. And today, this glorious morning, we are once again invited to respond to it in the same way that Mary does: with more love. But not just love of Jesus but of his siblings too. For Mary does what she is asked to do; she fulfills Jesus's call to become an apostle, to *tell* others of this great love that defeated even death itself. She is charged with proclaiming the good news: that through the risen Lord, we have all been adopted into this love; we have all been accepted as beloved children of God.

And such is our charge, too. It is not enough that we cling to Jesus in love and adoration. If we have encountered the powerful love of God in the risen Lord, then we must respond by communicating such love to all *we* encounter, with our words and through our lives. Love brought Jesus into his tomb; and love brought him out. That same love brings us to the risen Lord, alleluia!, but that same love *also* sends us out, into the world, to spread the good news: Christ is risen! The Lord of love is risen indeed! Alleluia.

ⁱ John 15:15