

Expectations

John 20:1-18

About a year ago, I was teaching the preschool children of the church I was serving prior to coming to LaPorte. I was telling them the story of Holy Week using the resurrection eggs. As you may remember from last week, there are items inside the eggs that we can link to the events that took place on that last week before the crucifixion of Jesus.

For instance, we have coins to remind us that Judas betrayed Jesus for 30 silver coins. We have a cross that reminds us of the crucifixion. There is a nail and we use it to tell the children that Jesus was nailed to the cross. And then, there is the last egg which is empty.

I was very excited! We had reached the best part of the story. I asked the kids, *“What do you think there is inside this egg?”* All the times before, I shook the eggs as a way to invite them to guess what was inside. Every time, we could hear some kind of noise. This time I did the same and there was no noise. The egg was empty. Shaking the empty egg, I asked the children, *“Do you think there is something or nothing inside this egg? Can you tell by the sound?”*

I was expecting the children to say “nothing.” But, there was this four-year-old boy, who shouted at the top of his lungs, “Clothing, clothing!!!” I said, “What?” He said, “Yes, inside are the cloths Jesus left in the tomb.”

Let me tell you, that’s how you destroy the lesson of the pastor in less than a second. The little boy was right. The tomb was not totally empty, the cloths Jesus had been wrapped in were left in it. The point is, I was not expecting that answer. My expectations were challenged that day.

The reason I told you this story is because we all have expectations. We have expectations that we acknowledge and those we don’t fully realize.

Nevertheless, we have them and they affect how we live and perceive our environments.

For instance, when we talk about the resurrection of Jesus, we think of the dramatic and spectacular events that Matthew describes in the gospel that bears his name. We think of the violent earthquake, angels with appearances like lightning, frightened Roman soldiers, alarmed and confused disciples. However, our expectations may be challenged by reading John's account.

I love how the gospel of John recounts the resurrection of Jesus. Out of the four gospel writers, John is the one who narrates the resurrection of Jesus by describing the human condition in a way that might resonate with many of us. We don't find too many special effects in John's retelling. John begins his account with the words, "*Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark...*" (**John 20:1 NIV**).

While it was still dark...

For John, the resurrection took place in the middle of the darkness of that early morning. This is such an important detail! Most likely, John is not only talking about the physical absence of light. John is describing perhaps the emotional state, the spiritual condition, the shadows of grief, the feelings of hopelessness and discouragement that possessed the followers of Jesus.

It was still dark... This phrase takes me back to the beginning, when God began to create. The Bible says the "*earth was a soup of nothingness, a bottomless emptiness, total blackness*" (**Genesis 1:1 MSG**). But in that chaotic darkness, God was busy creating life, paradise, the first garden, the Garden of Eden.

Mary is now going to the garden. The place where Jesus had been buried. We know Mary is going to a certain garden because she mistakes Jesus for the gardener. I want you to see the parallel: *God began the*

creation of the first garden while it was still dark; Mary came to the garden while it was still dark. Do you see the resemblance?

Many times, we think that new life appears in an act of extravagant performance. Yet, John is reminding us that God is at work in the middle of darkness. The Scripture is telling us that God is at work, even when we are unable to see God's activity because of the shadows surrounding us. John's account of the resurrection is reminding us that God is laboring and delivering new life in the midst of abandonment, disillusionments, fears, chaos and all the shadows we find in life.

When our reality is grim, when our families are struggling, when we are more mournful than joyful, more fearful than optimistic, God is working, bringing about new life. Even in the midst of darkness, where we cannot see clearly and our expectations do not rise above our experiences, God is developing new life. Darkness cannot prevent God's work from being fully accomplished.

It is important that we understand this truth, especially in a world where we try to explain darkness as the absence of God. Darkness is the result of the human attempt to take over and ignore God's presence, purposes and will. But, I believe in the God who works even in the shadows we find ourselves in. I believe in the God who is light and "*shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it*" (**John 1:5 NIV**).

According to John, Mary arrived at the tomb when it was still dark. She expected nothing more than to find the body of Jesus right where it had been laid on Friday afternoon. This was also the expectation of all the disciples. Even when Jesus had told them, "*I am going to suffer, die **and rise again**,*" they were expecting to find a body, not an empty tomb.

Their expectations were so strong that even after finding the empty tomb, they could not entertain the idea of a risen Christ. Their expectations was so strong that they suspected theft as they tried to make

sense of the empty tomb. It seemed like someone had taken away the body of the Lord. Because of their expectations, a bad situation was turned, at least in their minds, into a worse situation.

John and Peter saw the empty tomb, believed that Jesus' body had most likely been stolen and went back to the place where they were staying. Mary stayed there, outside the tomb, crying. Her pain had increased exponentially. She saw two angels, but her response to the presence of the angels was more weeping, more tears.

I wonder how many times we are blinded by our own expectations. I wonder if a great deal of our sufferings is due to the things we are anticipating. At first, Mary's expectation caused her to miss Jesus in the perceived darkness surrounding her. Even though she was witnessing the resurrection, she was not affected by it. Even though she was an eyewitness to the good news, she was not yet living in the good news. I believe it all started with an expectation.

There are times, when our expectations become the ceiling of our life's reality. They determine what we see, dominate what we believe, and in the worst-case scenario, control our destiny. What expectations do you have right now that are holding you back? I am talking about those expectations born out of past "failures."

What disappointments of the past are defining your present and controlling the way you look at the future? A betrayal? A missed opportunity? An unfulfilled dream? Lack of love and attention from those who were responsible to care for your wellbeing? A dead-end job, a lost child, a hard-to-overcome addiction?

Are these failures and letdowns creating apathy? Are they producing a pessimistic attitude in you? Are they generating shadows that keep you

blind to the infinite possibilities God is presenting before your very eyes?

There are times when our expectations prevent us from experiencing the miracle of resurrection, of a brand-new and glorious beginning.

Jesus' followers expected to find a body, not an empty tomb. At first, that perception dominated their experience. Peter and John ran away, but Mary stayed and waited. Mary did what many of us don't like to do, she waited. As Mary waited, the Risen Christ established a conversation with her: "*He asked her: Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?*"

I love the fact that in the gospel of John, the resurrection is announced amid tears and fears. In John's writing, the resurrection of Jesus is disclosed for the very first time in a casual and intimate conversation. The announcement of the resurrection is not made with trumpets, but with a simple and tender word coming from the mouth of Jesus, "Mary."

Perhaps, you may have been waiting for God to break through your suffering with great drama. Maybe you have been searching for the kind of God we see in the other Easter stories who breaks in like an earthquake, displays power by rolling away stones, and snaps us to attention with the voice of an angel. And you are still waiting... sitting with your pain and fear rather than running from them.

Let me tell you, the Lord will come to you because God is resurrecting dead things to life all the time, all around us. It is true that many times we are locked in our own fears, anxieties, and expectations, and we miss God's work. No matter what, God will come to you. God will speak to you and will call you by name. I do believe that the same God who called Mary by name is whispering yours at this very moment.

Here is the importance of Jesus saying Mary's name. Mary began to experience the power of the resurrection once she heard the Master calling her by name. Then, she realized that her Lord was fully present. From this point on, Mary's life will be different. The idea of theft will be replaced by the reality of the resurrection. She is going to run, not out of fear but with great joy. She will be changed by the resurrection of Jesus. She will live in the good news of the resurrection.

Today, the Lord is calling you by name out of the dark places you may find yourself. If you feel trapped in shadows, know that God is laboring and delivering new life. Heaven is conspiring in your favor. There is no darkness that can prevent the work of God from being accomplished.

I pray for you to be receptive to the voice of God. May you have the willingness to be in conversation with the Great I Am. Soon, you will hear God calling your name and your expectations, big and small, will disintegrate before the extraordinary work God is already performing in your life. A work that according to the Bible, *"no eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no human mind has conceived"* (1 Corinthians 2:9 NIV).

Jesus is calling you by name, reassuring you that he is alive, therefore:

- You are not alone
- You can be transformed
- You can be open to the unexpected from God
- You can face the uncertainties of life with confidence and humility
- You can live in the good news and instill in others the joy of the resurrection.

Prayer...