

Easter Reflection – April 20, 2014
Reverend Carolyn Patierno

Matthew 28:1-10 & 16-20 (NRSV)

After the Sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightening, and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.' This is my message for you.' So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee. There they will see me. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

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"The other Mary" You may be wondering, "Who was 'the other Mary' "? True, Mary of Magdalene was there and named. You likely have been misled about her as so many have. I'll say only this: for her heroic life of courage and kindness; her constancy beside Jesus through – what is it you say? "through thick and thin"? - she deserves the name of "saint" bestowed upon her by some Christians, at least. The others who somehow think she was a prostitute are wrong. (Although there were plenty of prostitutes – and others who were reviled and rejected in the community – at the table with us. All with the inherent dignity you all talk about.)

Just wanted to clear that up.

The other Mary? That would be me. I've observed all of the guessing about who I might be. Let's just say I'm not Mary of Magdalene and not the Blessed Mother. I'm "the other Mary" – but you can just call me "Mary." There at the tomb. And I too, have a story.

I've grown weary that this part of the story is eclipsed by all the other, let's face it, drama. So I've come forward through time and tale to share a different perspective. I thank you for having me.

The flowers are lovely, by the way.

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You never know what to expect at Easter! (Did you expect to see *me*, for example?) In the Bible, four versions of the story are told, each a bit different than the others. There is the big miracle and mystery of Jesus' return. But there was another miracle that was not as stunning, true, but is one that you moderns may still be able to get behind.

I was looming when in December Rebecca reflected on the meaning of miracle. She said a miracle is "*a change in perception that results in hope.*" That's what I'm talking about. Thank you, Rebecca, for the excellent lead in.

The miracle I'm talking about was overlooked through time, I'm sorry to say. The change of perception that resulted in hope. If only our voices – all the "Marys", if you will – could have broken through the commotion I do wonder what Jesus' church might have become.

So, come round and close, Friends, and hear of a new miracle ...

Not to brag, but Jesus was my friend. He was different. Some were afraid of him ... afraid to take heed of the different life that he taught. There were so few of us and the way was perilous.

But I didn't care. I felt free. Emboldened. I am not afraid to say now nor then.

But my brothers. Just a word about my brothers in Jesus. Good men, all, but oh, disappointing at the end. Driven by fear: asleep in the garden. Willing to deny. Betray. My life had been lived in the shadows before. I would not go back. Even in those brutal last days. And those last days, ironically, began at the Seder.

Oh, and another thing. I see your mosaics ... your frescos and paintings ... your art that somehow and always misses this point: we were there. The women were there. Who do you think prepared that meal?

And none of us were looking away.

We entered the fray, my sisters and I. We were in the middle of the teeming mobs, close enough so that he could see that we would not forsake him.

Oh, you have heard the story of that horrible day. The human capacity for torture, for evil, that overcomes all sense of righteousness and compassion. Alas, I see that capacity remains today.

My sisters and I kept with him. We stood at the foot of the cross, staring straight into our new reality: he was gone.

Two days passed during which we were stunned in the quiet of our grief. But on the third day, we made our way to the tomb, herbs and linen in hand. We knew what we had to do: anoint and bless his body in the right manner.

We knew not what to expect. Would there be guards to contend with? Would we pass unseen? We walked the rough road and kept each other close, united in an endeavor to care for him who had cared for so many. Who the prophets named as the "Prince of Peace."

And then – total shock – the earth moved beneath our feet but it was our souls that were shaken because there was a sheath of light ...

Let me stop there. I know that in this time, you don't go in for angels. Although recently, Reverend Caitlin did put in a good word for their shining presence. (I loom around here frequently, you see.) I was glad for that – for you.

Unexpected, the angel – the shining presence – appeared. We were afraid.

And here, Friends, is where the miracle began to emerge. The words we heard above the din of the beating of our own hearts were these:

"Do not be afraid."

Although, honestly, my first response was something like, "*Really?*" these words found their way through that fear. I who had always been slow to trust, even slower to forgive, I looked into that unexpected light as though it was the rising of my own personal sun.

And I went toward it. You bet I did.

The angel continued, "I know that you are looking for Jesus. He is not here; for he has been raised. Go quickly and tell his friends that he is going ahead of you to Galilee. There you will see him."

Mary and I entered the tomb to do what we came to do. But, indeed, Jesus was gone as the angel had said. We let our grief rest and quickly went our way. That place of grief – a lonely place, indeed, became a place of joy. New perspective.

We ran to find our brothers to then hurry off to Galilee. We ran down that road past crowds of people who knew nothing of our task but doubtless many of whom had demanded Jesus' death just two days before. Of these Jesus said, "Forgive them. They know not what they do." We ran through the echo of these words and Alleluia! Standing right before us was the man himself!

As clear as day he said, "Greetings!"

We fell to the ground. Can you imagine seeing the one you lost for the one more time we all yearn for? Believe me, you would collapse too and perhaps, like us, you'd be a little afraid.

But as the angel had said, so did he: "Do not be afraid. Go tell them to go to Galilee. There they will see me."

And then he said the most amazing thing. He said,

"I am with you always, to the end of the age."

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So here's the miracle unnoticed: the Easter story is also a response to grief. "I am with you always." "Do not be afraid."

As we lay on that road, collapsed with fear, shock, grief and joy, we were called to rise up again. To find reason to go on. To trust. To forgive. To move swiftly to share a new truth. And so we did. We got up.

Unexpected, new perspective. A miracle. The account of miracles in the Good Book somehow miss these in the telling.

I heard your prayer earlier. It was a good one:

Because if by some miracle (and why not)
He did come back
Wouldn't he want to see us like this?
[So that] he could take a look around and say,
'This is what I meant!'
And we could say
'It took us a long time ...
But we finally figured it out!' (Victoria Weinstein, excerpt)

We are the resurrection and the life, Friends.

I hope you believe that anything can happen. That you remember that on this day, and every day, anything can happen.

That you remember to honor love and all of its possibilities by dreaming lovely dreams.

That you treat each other tenderly and share life's goodness.

For these are the unexpected and small but powerful Easter miracles – when fear gives way to trust.

May it be true for you.

Says me - the other Mary.

Amen.