

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

Welcome back old friends - It is so good to see you in person today!

I hope that you have all been reading the reflections in the Lenten devotional - that is filled with words of your following the One who has showed us that death is truly not the end of life.

There were stories of lament and loneliness,

of hope and promise,

of seeking

and of gratitude.

We are blessed by each other - in this community of faith.

The gospel reading today begins in the darkness of the early morning

on the first day of the week

when Mary Magdalene went to the tomb.

Mary had no spices to anoint Jesus' corpse — as Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus had already wrapped the body in linen, myrrh, and aloes.

Historical tradition says she was a prostitute from Magdala.

That story began in 591 when Pope Gregory I conflated her with another Mary of Bethany - the "sinful woman" who anointed Jesus's feet.

Mary Magdalene was probably a woman that had social status and wealth - a woman who accompanied Jesus and his disciples and helped them with her own resources.

In 2016, Pope Francis declared a major feast day in her honour on the 22nd June. The woman who first proclaimed Jesus' resurrection is now considered to be an apostle to the apostles.

It is *that* Mary who went to the tomb when it was still dark.

She came empty handed with a heavy heart - to be near her friend who she had just seen tortured and crucified.

There is a collective grief that we all experience in these days -

We have seen so many tombs — and countless deaths that could not even have proper tombs — since the outbreak of COVID-19.

Sadly, at a time when we recognize the fragility and preciousness of life, we grieve the deaths from 3 senseless mass shootings in the last two weeks - Atlanta, Boulder and in Orange, CA.

We know what it's like to want to be close to a loved one who has died.

Mary Magdalene was confused - disoriented - when she found the tomb empty and thought that Jesus' body had been moved — but the presence of the linen wrappings and face covering suggested otherwise.

Anyone who moved the body would have no reason to remove the linens, much less neatly “roll up” the face covering.

Peter and another disciple came - and then returned to their homes.

Mary stayed behind - weeping.

And then looked into the tomb again where the body of Jesus had been lying and saw two angels and said to them that, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him."

Then she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but didn't recognize it was Jesus. She thought he was the gardener.

But then he said her name - an echo of his teaching - the Good Shepherd who knows his sheep and calls them by name...

She turned to him and said, “Rabbi”, - and started to go towards him but Jesus said, “Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”

We don't know what that body of Jesus was like - different than the physical now, but still an embodiment of Jesus who was recognized by others.

Mary Magdalene went and told the others. "I have seen our beloved rabbi and friend, our Lord".

Jesus promised as he shared a final meal with his disciples, "I will not leave you orphans".

We are secure in a love and presence that surrounds us and sustains us.

The Roman cross, a symbol of torture and death, is remade into one of the Tree of Life.

I have a poem taped to the inside of my bible from Galway Kinnel called St Francis and the Sow.

In part it reads:

...everything flowers, from within, of self-blessing;

though sometimes it is necessary

to reteach a thing its loveliness,

to put a hand on its brow

of the flower

and retell it in words and in touch

it is lovely

until it flowers again from within, of self-blessing;

The world needs the love and the mercy of Christ who showed us there is so much more to life.

People have been living with stress of loneliness,

or trying to learn technologies to Zoom and livestream and stay connected,

or working at home with children who would normally be in school,

so many financial stresses as people lost jobs and had earnings reduced ---

When people are chronically stressed they react from the prefrontal cortex and areas in the brain that are focused on survival - the part of the brain tasked with more complex thought takes a back seat.

I believe that we are experiencing a collective chronic stress reaction.

And we here -

we who follow the voice of the Good Shepherd

Need to be that voice to remind others

that they are lovely until they can flower,

from within, of self-blessing;

The Talmud says that each person is obligated to recite

100 blessings each day,

suggesting that the way to live connected to the Divine is through living a life immersed in blessings, in gratitude.

God blesses Adam and Eve to fill the world,

Abraham is called a blessing for all his descendants,

Jacob stole the first-born blessing and altered his future,

the high priests bless the nation with an ever-expanding relationship with peace.

Brian Baker, who was the former dean of Trinity Cathedral in Sacramento, started attending the Burning Man festival several years ago.

Burning Man is an annual communal gathering where people collaborate,

And are inclusive of all (reminds me of the second reading today where Paul says “I truly understand that God shows no partiality”).

At the end there is a symbolic burning of a large wooden effigy referred to as the Man. ... hence the name Burning Man.

Dean Baker wrote that as he was tearing down his camp after Burning Man a tall, thin, young white man with long blonde hair came by and asked if he could borrow his rake. They all rake their campsites to make sure they aren't leaving behind MOOP (Matter Out of Place).

Then the man asked him, “How will you be different when you go back to the Default World?”

That question made me think of Easter -

because when we really believe in the resurrection -

really believe that life continues

it is life changing. Every year we are reminded of this at Easter and every year we are invited into waking up to the fragility and preciousness of Life and that how we treat each other matters for eternity -

And then we return to our ‘default’ world”.

Dean Baker said he was moved by the depth and sincerity of his questions, offered the man the gift he brought to Burning Man - a blessing -

And asked the tall, thin, young white man with long blonde hair -

“May I bless you?” and the man said yes.

Baker wrote:

I placed my hands on his shoulders,

looked in his eyes and said,

“The world now is too dangerous, and too beautiful,

for anything but love.”

Then I blessed his eyes, ears, mouth, hands and feet – kissing his feet.

I placed my hand firmly on his chest and said,

“And may your heart be so opened, so set on fire that your love, YOUR LOVE, changes everything.”

His eyes welled with tears.

I would like you to close your eyes and see the risen Christ standing before you in a body that is recognizable, in a body that is both like our physical body and yet different.

Christ, your friend, is offering to bless you
and place his hands on your shoulders,
look in your eyes and say to you - you are blessed
and then blesses your eyes,
your ears,
your mouth,
your hands
and your feet –

Then he places his hand firmly over your heart.

“And may your heart be so opened, so set on fire that your love, YOUR LOVE, changes everything.”

AMEN