

Homily  
Easter Sunday  
April 16, 2017

In the Name of the Father, Son & Holy Spirit, Amen.

Nothing about Easter is routine or predictable. Our lives, our world and our encounters with God are always in flux. Change, crisis, encounters situations lead us to search for and try to grasp the implications of the resurrection story in new and renewed ways that says something about God's intentions for humanity with fresh and vital connections.

In Acts, Peter delivers a short homily to Cornelius's household about how the proclamation of the resurrection can work. He summarizes the story of Jesus however his words reflect how the gospel transforms how they comprehend God. It is not just a matter of knowing and reciting details about an empty tomb, as important as such details are. More importantly, the resurrection provides evidence of God's commitment to all humanity.

Peter gives a summary of Jesus' history: he lived, did good, died, and rose. The surprising set of circumstances convinced Peter that his previous assumptions about God were no longer valid. He does not play favourites; rather, He has concern for all humanity and welcomes all peoples. Jesus is Lord of *all*. Because God was with him, he healed *all* who were oppressed. Release from sins now comes to everyone who believes in him.

The second reading appointed for this Easter Sunday is from Colossians. It begins with advice giving: "so if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God".

This short text refers to the resurrection of Jesus, it connects believers to it and it outlines response that the writer hopes will guide believers. The resurrection affects not only Jesus but all those who trust in Him. We are called to seek the things that are above. The author calls on believers to lift their vision, to look beyond the complications and messiness of daily life and to find direction for living from above. And this is not a one-time-only decision but a decision that needs to be made over and over again.

And then we heard the Gospel story. This narrative that John presents lies at the heart of the good news. Jesus, who was crucified, has been raised. Mary, Peter and the unnamed disciple discover that Jesus' tomb is empty; the outward and visible sign that Jesus has conquered death and a new creation has begun.

And John tells us that when Mary meets her risen Lord, her grief turns to joy and she brings the good news that has been proclaimed throughout the ages until the present day: "I have seen the Lord".

Rev. Lucy Hogan, an Episcopal Church, author of *The Six Deadly Sins of Preaching* says that John's gospel is a story about searching, sadness, fear, action, surprise and joy. And it is a story that takes us full circle to the opening of the gospel.

The story opens with Mary Magdalene, a solitary figure walking through the darkness to tend to the body of her teacher and friend. All gospel accounts of this moment vary on some points but what is consistent is that Mary Magdalene is the first to go to the tomb.

When she finds that the stone has been removed she jumps to conclusions. Her perception of what has happened is that someone has

entered and stolen the body. John does not tell us if she even looked in the tomb but we do know she runs back to tell Peter what she believes has happened.

Peter and the unnamed disciple, like Mary, run. The younger arrives first and waits until the senior, Peter, arrives. Inside, Peter discovers that the tomb is empty and unlike Lazarus, who stumbled out of the tomb in his burial wrappings, the cloths are still in the tomb.

John tells us that the beloved disciple "saw and believed". But what did he believe. It could be that he believed Mary was correct - someone had stolen the body of Jesus. Or did he believe what Jesus said the night of their last meal together, that Jesus had "conquered the world"!

Then the focus returns to Mary standing outside of the tomb weeping. This time she enters the tomb but does not find it empty. There are two angels. Two things drive us back to the beginning of John's gospel that encourage us how we might understand what has happened. In the opening of the *Gospel*, Jesus' first words are directed at the disciples of John the Baptist - "what are you looking for?"

And here, in this beginning, this new creation, Jesus asks Mary the same question, "who are you looking for?" A new ministry is beginning, a new story. And it is a question that is addressed to all of us this morning. "What are we looking for"?

It was when Jesus called her by name that Mary recognized her beloved Rabbouni. Is Jesus calling our name? Are we being called to see the new things that God is doing in our lives and in our world? And where are we? Are we in a garden? Without knowing it, Mary has correctly identified Jesus as the gardener. The gardener who is bringing a new life, a new world, and a new creation into being.

As is said in John's prologue: "all things came into being through him, and without him, not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it."

In His new creation, Jesus sends Mary out of the garden rejoicing. She is sent out to tell everyone that the darkness has not overcome the Word made flesh who lived among us. Her message declares to us the new beginning that God has prepared for all of us.

Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again.

Thanks be to God, Amen