

Easter Sunday
April 17, 2022
Luke 24: 1-12
Pastor Ann Hultquist

Cemeteries. At lunch this past week, some of the staff got to talking about them. It might seem a funny topic to take up during Holy Week, but then again, maybe not. One of the things we talked about was family members who have a “family plot” for everyone, usually back in the Midwest, where you are expected to return to one day so everyone can be ‘together.’ I imagine that some of you have experience with that. But as so many people move around and the culture changes, being interred at a place that is no longer home might not be so appealing.

My parents are buried in Boulder, where they met and where our family lived for a bit. I usually get to their grave once or twice a year, and it’s surprising to me that there are always people there, standing, kneeling to clean a stone, or to put flowers in a vase. Sure, on Memorial Day small flags flutter on veteran’s graves, and there is a crowd--but there is always a scattering of people on other ordinary days as well. I wonder if you’ve been there--oh, not at *that* cemetery but another one somewhere, drawn there to honor, to grieve, to remember those you love and those who loved you.

This is how the Easter story starts. Not with the disciples shouting “Alleluia!”, not with flowers, but with some women bringing spices to anoint Jesus’ dead body. Early in the morning, some women from Galilee go to the tomb where they had left Jesus. They come because they want to and because they need to.

They had seen all of it--Jesus nailed to the cross, dying in agony between two criminals. Rome knew how to envelop its subjects in fear and intimidation -and Pilate was only too happy to oblige, placing a sign above Jesus’ head that ironically ridiculed him as a “king.” They followed Joseph of Arimathea to the tomb on Friday and had watched Jesus’ lifeless body laid there and a stone rolled across the entrance.

Can you imagine what Friday evening was like for them? All day Saturday? The Sabbath was meant to be a joy...but not that day. Just grief, just anger, just fear. The spices they carried in their hands at dawn on Sunday hold all those emotions, because they signal an end...to everything: life, love, hope.

I don't know what you are carrying today as you come into this sanctuary. Our first reaction is to say "Me? Nothing. I'm fine." because that's what we are so schooled to say. However, think about the last two years. None of us have lived all of those days unscathed. Life was and, in some ways, still is upended. You might be carrying anxiety or sorrow or fear so deeply embedded inside that you don't even recognize it anymore. All that has happened during the pandemic--sickness, death, injustice, division, and now the horror and the tears of Ukrainians. You might be upset because someone made you come to church today and you think all this has nothing to offer you. Maybe you're ashamed because of something you did or didn't do. You might just feel empty.

Stop for a moment and hold all those feelings that we are so good at hiding away from other people and even from ourselves. Of all places, a church should be the space where we can do that, as we follow the women walking to the tomb at dawn. This is how the Easter story begins.

Did you notice the first word of this morning's Gospel from Luke? *But*, Luke writes. As in *however, nevertheless, yet, or in spite of this*. It's meant to get our attention, to tell us clearly that what is coming will not be business as usual. And it certainly isn't. There is a tomb but no body; there are no other mourners, just two angels who announce the incredible: "Jesus is not here, *but* has risen."

We can imagine that these women had experienced a great deal in their lives; and they had seen and heard so much while following Jesus. Yet nothing ever like this. What do you imagine? Can you picture them, dropping the jars and the bags with the burial spices and just leaving them next to the stone that had been rolled away? And then running, running back to the disciples with the incredible news— "Jesus is alive!" Only to be met with skepticism and really derision: "an idle tale" the disciples said. They didn't trust it, couldn't believe God's 'and yet.' Not yet. Not

until Jesus stood in front of them that evening...maybe not until much later, when they began to understand the power of God's relentless love in Jesus.

The worst that could be done had been done to Jesus. *And yet*, the way of violence, of hatred, the way of death would not, could not win. Love—expansive, forgiving, grace-filled love embodied in Jesus was the last word...*is* the last word. Jesus is risen.

Easter is our invitation to trust that good news even just a little bit; to trust that God's *and yet* is still at work in our lives and in the world. I wonder if we can imagine ourselves leaving all that *we* are carrying at the empty tomb? Or perhaps even better, placing all we are carrying in Jesus' wounded and risen hands, who holds all of it, each of us, and the whole world with tenderness and compassion. Held so gently, we can be strengthened to love this aching and wonderful world. Love lives. Hope lives. Jesus lives.