

Message: "Spiritual Acclimation"

Scripture: John 20:1-18

20Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. ²So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." ³Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. ⁴The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, ⁷and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. ⁸Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; ⁹for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. ¹⁰Then the disciples returned to their homes.

¹¹But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; ¹²and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. ¹³They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." ¹⁴When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." ¹⁶Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). ¹⁷Jesus said to her, "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.'" ¹⁸Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

If you are a regular attender of worship services at our church, you will recognize an emphasis to my messages that has grown over this past year, an emphasis of calling out the horrendous wrongs happening in our world and in our country for the reason that they are working against God's will. I am not alone in all of this; there are many preachers and rabbis and imams and priests and other faith leaders doing the same thing with their congregations - for we are in a time of great disruption and moral upheaval that demands response. Too many are silent for reasons of complacency or apathy or fear; too many are loud in the wrong direction, promoting God as a supporter of Christian Nationalism or white supremacy or environmental abuse or the glorification of war, none of which reflect anything like God's will. I find it impossible to be silent when God is misrepresented in such egregious ways.

Which is why, today, I need to call out yet another horrific development in this world full of deplorable realities. I became aware of this development when I turned on the radio to listen to the news the other day - and yes, it was all bad news, as seems to be the pattern these days. In that news there were announcements of epic-fury bombings and first amendment rights abuses and Epstein files being withheld and national leaders lying like a fire hose turned on full-blast - you, know, the usual news stories - but then one particular news item

stood out. It had to do with how difficult Easter was going to be this year because - steady yourselves now - the price of chocolate has skyrocketed. You know that staple of all Easter baskets, the Cadbury crème egg, the egg that was originally found in the easter basket Jesus carried? It now costs \$5.49 in some places. \$5.49! Outrageous! That news had me rush down to our local Pattie Creek market, where I discovered that, thank goodness, the high prices have not yet hit our fair town; you can buy a Cadbury crème egg for \$1.99. That's still pretty high, but affordable. I thought to myself, Easter is saved!

No, I didn't really, of course, but this news story called to mind how deeply we humans become alarmed at the state of the world, sometimes becoming alarmed over pretty trivial stuff. If rising prices on chocolate easter eggs can cause such tension as to feel a holiday is ruined, what's to become of us when greater traumas assail us? In our scripture lesson, Mary echoes this tendency; to her, it wasn't Easter that was ruined, for of course it had yet to happen. It was reality that was ruined; her master, her God, her teacher and advocate and friend had died and put her worldview into a downward spiral; this was the same for all the disciples and followers of Jesus who watched the unbelievable happen - they watched an innocent man die, they saw God crucified, they witnessed evil win. Or so it seemed. Even at the tomb, with Mary first seeing its violation with the stone rolled away and discovering its empty chamber, she was in a state of continued horror as if the death of Jesus wasn't enough for the world; they had to add insult to injury by stealing his body. You can almost sense Mary's blindness to the teachings of Jesus about hope beyond despair and his continued presence in spirit and his messages about eternity with God as she stood there bewildered and in pain - but then, something happened that always changes the perceptive soul. God showed up. Against all the odds, against reason and history and physical possibility, God showed up. After death. After evil had its way. After the worst humanity could do to God's creation. God showed up - and helped Mary to see.

We are much in the same kind of space and time as Mary, I think, when we find ourselves immersed in the impossibilities of our world. We see man's inhumanity to man all over the place, where evil takes the form of ICE raids and wars of choice and new attempts at colonialization and obscene greed borne on the backs of the poor and marginalized; these are days when such evil doings seem to be unstoppable, plunging our world into ever deeper darkness. Much like the experience of Mary, the darkness can be so blinding as to take our breath and our hope away - but even in these days of technological deviance and media frenzy,

even in these days of presidential-level lying and world-leader deception, God shows up. God shows up in those voices who remain committed to truth and morality, speaking to counter the rhetoric that has taken the world down a dark path. God shows up in those voices who are rising now to speak truth to power and justice to inequity. God shows up in those nations who refuse to join in a war of choice and choose instead to re-commit themselves to the methodologies of peace. God shows up in these macro-spaces of global influence.

But God shows up even more on the micro levels of each of our lives, much as he did with Mary; God shows up in the individual acts of defiance of the status quo; God shows up in the kindnesses we show each other on a daily basis, from caring words to loving gestures to helpful actions; God shows up in the service we share towards others borne out of Christ's love; God shows up whenever we take the risk of loving the stranger, caring for the dispossessed, listening to the brokenhearted, staying with the isolated, forgiving the one who wronged us, and reconciling with the ones we have wronged. God shows up in these ways, constantly, consistently, on every day between this Easter and the next, for our God is a daily agent of grace, showing the faithful heart again and again that there is no darkness that can keep God from being with us whatever the world comes up with. Nothing stops God from showing up. Nothing.

It is for us to notice this truth about God, though; it is a truth that is easily missed due to a very distractive world. God gave us Jesus to help us be less distracted; Jesus shows us that the heart must surpass the mind, and compassion must exceed ego for one to notice the presence of God. The eyes can be deceived and the mind confused; but the heart, when centered in Jesus, has become something willing to be led by God - and this makes all the difference. Being willing to be led by God puts the world on a secondary tier; to such a centered life, what happens here and now is never the end of all things; in fact, what happens here and now that speaks of endings may in fact herald beginnings we never thought possible. We find the experience of Mary becoming our own, as we understand that God can show up however and whenever God wants - and how humbling it is that God shows up so very often on our behalf, for our benefit.

In the end, Easter is God's "to be continued" announcement to the world; the moment of Christ's resurrection is not the end of God's narrative but its beginning for all who are open to God's truth. Life goes on - it changes, it struggles, it rises it falls, it is birthed and it dies - but eternity remains under God's sovereign control, as God's gracious gift to the world, a gift made available for the asking, a

gift that no human action may keep from being offered. But it is a gift that must be wanted, a gift that must be received with hearts willing to believe and lives willing to be led; faith shows us how.

Life is given at birth; death follows when the physical journey is over; but death is never the end for those who belong to God. No matter what endings we experience in life, God says the same thing - "to be continued." This is the Easter message Jesus came to share.