

Pastor Kris Litman-Koon

Date: 12 April 2020, Easter Sunday, Drive-In Worship at All Saints

Lesson: Matthew 28:1-10

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We can relate to the last verse in Matthew that describes the horrific events of that Friday. “Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.” And that day comes to an end. The story tells us it was already evening, and they should have begun their journey back to their shelter long ago. But these women needed to see this to the very end. They sat at the tomb and wept as the light of the world departed. We can relate to that.

Matthew’s gospel picks up their story on Sunday. “After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb.” Matthew’s gospel doesn’t say why they went there; it makes no mention of them carrying spices or a desire to somehow have the stone moved. Matthew’s narrative implies they had no plan. All that these Marys were doing was fulfilling a need to check in. *On what?* They needed to check in on the reality of death. That is what we can relate to.

Perhaps you’ve already realized that using every waking hour to absorb the news is neither helpful nor a healthy practice, but there still remains within us a burning need to at least daily check on the reality of death. What are today’s numbers? Has the virus touched anyone that I know? How rampant is it around me? What has death wrought since yesterday?

So we can relate to the Marys needing to check in on the grim reality that early morning. Then a unique detail takes place. Just as these Marys arrive at the tomb an earthquake occurs. I’ve experienced seven earthquakes in my life, and it should be no surprise to hear that not a single one of them was enjoyable. They are literally unsettling due to their violent upheaval of the foundation upon which we stand. Our whole selves have a

primal trust that we can depend on what is beneath our feet; if that trust is suddenly broken, our minds immediately panic.

As those Marys trudged toward that tomb, they knew the foundational truth of this world: death always prevails. Each step to the tomb was a painful reminder to them that the foundation of this world rests on the reality of death. Dead people remain dead. Everything rests upon that. Then came the earthquake. The guards freak out. The stone rolls away. An angel shows up. So while bitter sorrows were stabbing at their hearts, God had already been up to something. The Marys were expecting a dead-end at the conclusion of their walk, but little did they know that God already had something in the works.

The world sees its foundation as being situated on the firm reality of death prevails. According to that foundation, only a cross is seen, only a tomb is known, and only the bitter anguish of grief is felt. But God finds that foundation unsuitable. God's Kingdom won't be built upon the same old foundation. A new foundation is needed for God's new creation. So when the world sees a cross, God sees salvation! When the world sees a path to a tomb, God sees a path to new life! And when the world is struck by that bitter anguish of grief, God enters and strikes with an earth-shaking promise of hope.

But let's be clear: this is unsettling. It is disturbing to find shaky any foundation upon which we stand, whether that involves the physical ground beneath us or the metaphorical ground of death's dominance. When we are accustomed to thinking, "That is just how the world works," it is startling to realize that this is no longer firm ground for us to stand.

In the resurrection of Jesus Christ, there is far more taking place than just his resurrection. There is far more going on than the promise that we will share in his resurrection. What also takes place is an earthquake, and earthquakes are destructive. It is the destruction of death's firm grip on this world. An earthquake destroys that but it also ushers in a new foundation: Life is the foundation of God's new creation.

Author Barbara Johnson once wrote that we are Easter people living in a Good Friday world. That is most certainly true. And there are times -- individually and collectively -- that our experience looks so much like Good Friday that there is almost no glimmer of hope or light left. But remember this: it was in that darkness before the first day of the week that God was already up to something. It was pre-dawn when the Marys prepared for another encounter with the reality of death, yet it was in the pre-dawn that God's best work was already underway.

We are Easter people living in a Good Friday world. We long for a day when fear does not permeate all of life around us. We long for a day when we are no longer separated physically from loved ones. We long for a day when our congregation no longer is separated in our singing, no longer separated in our practice of sharing bread and wine. We live in a Good Friday world that has effectively separated us. Yet in the resurrection of our Lord, God has shattered that old foundation. God has given us a new foundation to plant our hope: that God does the best work when times are still dark. In a Good Friday world where a virus requires that we separate physically from each other, separate from our common life practices and our certainties, separate from our normal means of worship, cling to this promise that God gives you through our Lord's resurrection: nothing can ever separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Nothing.

No matter how dark the night may seem, God is at work. Nothing can separate you from God's love in Christ Jesus, and that changes everything.

Thanks be to God! Alleluia and Amen!