

Acts 10:34-43, Psalm 118:14-17, 22-24, Colossians 3:1-4, Mark 16:1-8

“When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome brought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb.”

The women had probably been weeping for most of the last two days. Probably they were exhausted from it, even as they dragged themselves from bed in the dark on the day after the Sabbath.

And they gathered the necessary supplies, to do right by Jesus’ body, which had been so hastily laid in the tomb, almost in secret, by Joseph of Arimathea as the sun set on that terrible Friday. At least Mary Magdalene had had the presence of mind to watch where he was buried, so that now at last they could anoint his body.

I imagine that there must have been a strong sense of unreality among the remnant of Jesus’ followers on Holy Saturday, as minds and hearts struggled to make sense of Jesus’ absence.

I wonder if even those who had stayed by him and seen him die felt a sort of hazy confusion all that long Sabbath about how he could really be gone. How their hopes could have failed so completely. How they could have been so mistaken about who Jesus was and what he would do.

I imagine that these three women rose on Sunday with a terrible dread of what they must do. It was about to all become real again – the horror and the grief of Jesus’ death – when they had to see and even touch his body again.

And then – no! He wasn’t there! The body was gone, and a strange and compelling young man, robed all in white (*could* he be an angel?!) was telling them “He is not here – he is risen!”

In this gospel passage according to St. Mark, we encounter the story of Resurrection right at the point of shock. Why is the tomb open? Where is the body? Who is this mysterious young man?

And *is it possible*, just maybe, that Jesus’ followers had been mistaken in their despair?

We stand with Mary, and Mary, and Salome at the first tiny glimmer of light. The first sliver of breaking dawn. This isn’t going as they expected.

Things hadn’t been going as expected for days – since Jesus’ triumphal entrance into Jerusalem had given way to startling hostility, then chaos, then devastation. Everything went horrifically wrong.

But now, standing at this shockingly empty tomb, *is it possible* that things didn’t go as wrong as all the disciples had thought they went? Is it *possible* that their dashed expectations, their crushed hopes, had not matched Jesus’ expectations and Jesus’ plan?

Now they wrack their brains, and remember some strange statements Jesus had made. About giving his body, about a temple being rebuilt, about “rising on the third day”. It had been too hard to make sense of the first two statements, impossible to take the third literally. But now, wait. Didn’t that young man in white just use the same word? His is *risen*.

It's so hard for us to come at this story fresh, because we've heard it so many times before. If we've been coming to church for 50 years, or even if we're very new, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is probably the most broadly known Christian story. So it's hard for it to come as a surprise for us.

But it was a *shock*. An utter, earth-shattering, mind-blowing shock. His death was a shock. His Resurrection infinitely more so. It was unlooked-for, even by the disciples Jesus had tried to forewarn. And so their amazement and their joy are unimaginable.

Our gospel passage today ends at the very first glimpse. Sudden baffling hope. Amazement. But still confusion, too, and some fear. But now that Resurrection has begun, joy and wonder will pick up speed.

Jesus is about to appear to Mary Magdalene. She's about to hear him speak her name, and look up to see her Lord before her. She's about to start running, wild with joy, to tell the apostles.

Jesus is about to share a meal with two terrified disciples fleeing Jerusalem for the town of Emmaus, and they're about to be shocked by how misplaced their fear has been.

We're only hours away from Jesus appearing to 10 of the 12 disciples, and eating his first meal with them since that Last Supper on Thursday night.

Joy is beginning to break out all over. A new, astounding reality is making itself known. The horror of death is losing its terrible finality, because Jesus has just blazed a trail right through death back into life again. And we can follow Jesus on that path to eternal life. Because of Easter Sunday, death is no longer the end. Resurrection has arrived!

Can we glimpse that hope today, as we, too, stand now before the empty tomb? Can we taste that joy, as we sing, and worship, and receive in our hands and on our lips a God who is living, and active, and stronger than death, and is flooding us with the reality of the power of love?

Even though it's hard for the Resurrection story to feel new to us, I don't think many of us are accustomed to the reality of Resurrection Life. We still see and fear death, and that feels a lot more real than the promise of resurrection – just as Jesus' death drowned out, for his disciples, any of his words about resurrection for three days.

We see violence and hatred in the world, and to our human eyes they seem a lot stronger and more pervasive than love.

But God's plan looks a lot different than human expectations. God's love is a lot more costly than human love looks most of the time.

But just as we see glimpses of that kind of love and sacrifice in human lives, glimpses that can take our breath away and move us to tears and make us believe in the power of love, so glimpses of Resurrection – of the power of life over death – are available to us too.

We glimpse Resurrection in the wonder of redemption, when a person turns from hatred, or violence, or addiction, and starts life in a new direction.

We glimpse Resurrection in the stirring of life in spring, or at any new birth (which is what eggs have to do with Easter, by the way).

And we glimpse it in the power of this Resurrection story we hear today, a story that drove hundreds – thousands – of Christians to every corner of the world – to tell what they had witnessed, to share the hope and love they had come to know, and to witness to the love of God that is more powerful than anything we might fear.

Christ is risen. Death is conquered. We will live forever.

Because God's love has no limit.

Alleluia.