

Message for Easter 2021 - April 4

John 20.1-18

Here's an interesting note about our Scripture today. Indeed, in all of the Gospels. There is no account of the Resurrection. No story detailing how it happened. Only the mystery. What we have are reports of the empty tomb. The appearances of heavenly beings and of the Risen Christ. This is, essentially, an epilogue. It feels a bit strange to frame it that way, this being the day on which we have based the whole of our faith...

But it does work. It comes from the Greek *epílogos* - *epi* meaning "in addition" and *logos*, meaning "word." An epilogue is a piece of writing at the end of a work of literature, usually used to bring closure to the work. It is presented from the perspective of within the story.¹ This is what we have here. Closure. Of sorts..... Maybe?

On the Sunday morning after Jesus has died, Mary of Magdala goes to the tomb. When she finds it open, she assumes that grave robbers have been and gone. So she runs to tell Simon Peter and the "other disciple," the Beloved Disciple. They are just as concerned as she is and end up racing to the tomb (literally). The other disciple wins the race and looks in the tomb and sees the linen wrappings, which means it wasn't grave robbers because they would not have left that behind. Peter finally catches up, and he goes into the tomb first. As usual, Peter doesn't get it. But when the other disciple enters, he sees and believes. Then, they both go home. Like it's a normal day. But then, I suppose, what else would they do?

In this additional word, this epilogue, we have examples of faith. The Beloved Disciple was the first to the tomb, and the first to believe. This person needed nothing more than the sight of an empty grave and discarded linens. Simon Peter, saw the same scene but did not reach the same conclusion. He will eventually get there, but not yet. In the next chapter, when Jesus appears beside Lake Tiberias, Peter will jump into the lake to greet him.

¹ <https://literarydevices.net/epilogue/>

For Mary, this empty tomb is not a reason for belief or even wonderment. It is a source of great sadness. She stays behind, weeping. She is so deep in agony that not even the appearance of two dazzlingly bright angels breaks her sorrow. She's not even fazed when they ask her why she is weeping. Of course she is heartbroken over the loss of Jesus, in life and now his body in death. Neither is her distress eased when Jesus appears right in front of her. She assumes that it is someone else. Not until he speaks her name does she recognize the one for whom she had been weeping. *The sheep know the shepherd's voice; the shepherd calls them by name and leads them out They follow because they recognize the shepherd's voice. (John 10.3-4)*

When she does recognize the one who speaks her name, Jesus tells Mary, "Do not hold onto me." Their relationship has changed. As have so many of ours. She(we) cannot long for what was. It is time to step forward in faith. Just as we can't go back to BC - Before Covid. Things are different now, and we need to lift our focus from our grief to see the good around us. To recognize the Easter moments in our midst.

We have created new ways of being church, new sanctuaries, and we will continue to do so. Perhaps we are blinded by grief, by boredom and loneliness, exhaustion as we enter a third wave here in Alberta. This is when we need to follow Mary's example to know that it is ok to be sad, but also to be willing to be surprised. To find joy when and where we can, and to proclaim it loudly.

As Rev. Dr. Marcia McFee notes, "We are an Easter people, called to proclaim the good news even in the midst of anxiety and long-suffering hardship. This is not blind optimism that ignores the realities of inequality and corruption, nor is it a toxic positivity that rushes too fast through pain to slap a Band-Aid on a critical wound. Joy can be a healing balm in hard times."

As we move out of the Lent-that-feels-like-it-will-never-end, and into Easter, let us take the literary device on the epilogue further, where we will see that it can satisfy the

readers' curiosity, by telling us about the fate of the characters after the climax.² We see this in faith stories of Simon Peter and Mary, and the other disciple. An epilogue can cover loose ends of the story. And, it can hint at a sequel or next installment. That is where we come in. The sequel, the next installment, it is us. Allowed to grieve, but also called to hope. We preach resurrection at funerals, because that is the moment we most need to hear it. Not just for the dead, but for us, the living, to keep on resurrecting our own lives here and now.

Let us dare to dance. To find joy amidst the sorrow. To know that God's presence covers us with love and grace, like an umbrella, giving us freedom, to move about, even dance in the rain.

² <https://literarydevices.net/epilogue/>