

St. Andrew's Episcopal Church  
Easter Eve Vigil Year B  
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Today in our journey toward resurrection, we find ourselves in the tomb. It's cold, it's dark; as we reach our hands out above us, beside us, and in front of us, and we feel the hard clammy stone walls, seemingly wanting to claim us, to contain us. It is unfamiliar territory, and not just a bit uncomfortable, it's fairly scary, this being in this place where we might find God. For we, like the women in this original ending of the gospel of Mark, when we are met with the unpredictable, when we encounter the mysterious God, we too are often drawn into silence, as a response to experiencing the terror and amazement at what awaits us, knowing it will be beyond our expectations and imaginations. And yet, somehow we know, perhaps intuitively, that if we just enter into this space, this holy ground as Carenda spoke about on Maundy Thursday, even for a fleeting moment, the best is yet to come!

Out of the dust of grief, light rises. This was our theme for Lent this year, and light rises out of the dust of grief, precisely because of what happened in the tomb in our story. The women came to the tomb out of the depths of their grief, and came away with something brand new – the knowledge of the risen Christ. Light doesn't come as a response to the dust being brushed away by us. Light rises from the dust of grief because God created a brand new way of us being with Jesus out of his death, a mystical union with the Risen Christ, which has the power to change our lives.

Resurrection is now found within the cold dark places of our hearts, tearing down the walls, which we thought could contain the living presence of Christ, which we had hoped would have made the new life offered to us by the risen Christ, to be just more of the same life we actually like, but we know now that is not true. Life as we knew it has been inextricably changed, forever.

The three women came in grief, to perform their last act of love and devotion to their master Jesus. They counted on this burial ritual as a way to work through their pain and loss. They wanted closure. But God didn't offer them closure, but rather a challenge to live more deeply into their discipleship. The anointing had happened chapters ago, when the scorned woman broke into the dinner party, and lavishly, foolishly, and abundantly poured expensive oil upon the body of Jesus and anointed him with love. The women came to the tomb, thinking they had this figured out, and knew what they needed to do, but God showed up in the tomb and broke open their way of thinking and being.

The last words in this original ending of the gospel of Mark are about being silent and living in the tension of terror and amazement at the challenge God puts before us. Obviously this is an uncomfortable place to reside, since somewhere along the line, scribes added two alternative endings to this story, and the later gospel writers

offered post-resurrection appearances of Jesus, to paint the picture more fully of what resurrected life is like. And yet responding in silence and choosing to live in this tension of fear and rejoicing, is not an unfaithful or inadequate response for these women or for us. My sense is that it is a necessary beginning point of any Easter proclamation.

We must sit in the tomb for a bit first, allowing our silence to stretch the space within us, where the voice of God can resonate.

To sit into the tomb, we must first answer God's invitation to allow God to remove the large stone at the entrance of our heart. The women in our story spent a lot of time wondering about how they were going to move the large stone from the tomb entrance, without bringing along resources to help with its removal. Perhaps they knew God would open the entrance for them.

Our stone, at the entrance to the tomb of our heart, must also be removed, so that we can walk ever more deeply into the place where the unimaginable will be revealed to us. The unimaginable peace which can enter our hearts when we're dealing with a difficult situation; the unimaginable resolve to forgive someone who has deeply hurt or betrayed us; the unimaginable release of someone we love to her physical death so their spiritual resurrection can be with us now.

I love praying Morning Prayer from our daily office for many reasons, but one being, that one of the concluding collects says, Glory to God, whose power working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or image. Our story today is the basis for this prayer: resurrection looks unlike anything we could ever ask for or imagine. The best is yet to come!

From the gospel writers who do tell post-resurrection stories, we know that the living Christ shows up in unrecognizable forms: Mary mistook the risen Christ for a gardener; the people walking on the road to Emmaus mistook the risen Christ for the only person in the area who was oblivious enough to not know about Jesus' crucifixion; the disciples and even Peter mistook the risen Christ to be a fisherman beginning to make breakfast on the beach. Resurrection looks unlike anything we could ever ask for or imagine. And the best is yet to come!

And we need to go into the tomb, walk into the presence of death, to find it. Not necessarily our physical death to find it- but rather the thousands of deaths we need to die to each day, so that we can peel away the obstacles which keep us from God. The large stones we place in the way which we can label pride, jealousy, greed, hatred, self-centeredness, anger, desire for power and control – all those sins we wrote on our slips of paper last evening and nailed to the cross, so that Jesus' light can shine brightly upon them and cast them away.

It is at this time when we need to be honest before God; we need to go the distance; we need to go beyond where we are in control; beyond where we are now; because grace is found at the depths, in the death of everything; because that's where we will meet God, and God will bring us out onto the other side.

Come with me into the tomb. Respond to our everlasting and life-giving invitation to prayer, to sitting in silence with others, to receiving or offering healing prayers, to offering your confession to God and feel the lavish anointing of your mind, body and soul by the forgiveness and grace poured upon you, to stretching out your hands to receive the Risen Christ in the Eucharist, so that resurrection happens this day in your life. Come with me into the tomb. You won't find the absence of Jesus, but rather the presence of Jesus.

Take your time, as the women at the tomb did, to be in silence, to live in the tension between terror and amazement at the presence of the holy within, acknowledge your fears, pull strength by being with others, but then finish the story.

Mark left us with this cliffhanger, I believe, so that our lives can tell the next chapter of the proclamation of the good news of Christ being risen. Let it make a difference to your life and to our world on this glorious occasion of our celebration of our Lord's resurrection!