

## **EASTER SOMETHING**

**Rev. Gregory Flint**

**John 20: 1 – 18**

**April 4, 2010**

**Easter Sunday**

What do you think happened that morning? The Easter thing, the Resurrection of Jesus. If you'd been there with Mary at the tomb, what would you have seen?

I once heard a preacher proclaim that on Easter "those dead bones of Jesus got up and walked right out of the tomb."

Is that what Easter is about - dead bones rising up, the resuscitation of a corpse?

I suppose one could read John's narrative that way. After all, it says the stone had been moved and angels sat where the body had been. Then Jesus is there and calls Mary by name.

What do make of that? How are we to hear what the Gospels tell us about Easter?

Well, there are so many differences and discrepancies in the Gospel stories of Easter that it's impossible to harmonize any of it. How many went to the tomb? Who was there first? Two angels or one? In the tomb or sitting on the rock? To whom did Jesus appear? Where?

About all the Gospels agree on is that no one expected to happen whatever happened.

But something did happen that was powerful. Powerful enough to change lives, so that the terrified, scattered disciples became fearless leaders of a new Jesus movement called the church. And it spread like wildfire.

Think about it: a woman named Mary Magdalene came back from the tomb of Jesus saying, "I have seen the Lord." And within a hundred years there were churches all across the Mediterranean world, North Africa, and as far as Rome. Within three hundred years that something set loose on Easter had changed the world.

Then think about how the world would be different without Easter. Jesus would have been forgotten, for one thing. Without Easter, there'd be no Christianity, no church, no Christmas Story, no singing "Silent Night" or "Jesus Loves Me," no shared ritual of communion, no art and architecture dedicated to Jesus. And all the works of mission and mercy done in Jesus' name across the centuries would either not have been done or done for other reasons.

And it's been argued maybe that wouldn't be a bad thing. Maybe the world would be better without what began that Easter morning. For a lot of awfulness has happened in the name of Jesus – persecution and bloodshed justified by those who claim to love Jesus.

What do you think? Would the world be better if nothing had happened that morning - if Mary had experienced nothing beyond her grief for a Jesus dead and gone?

And what about your life? Would you be different without Easter?

Without Easter you wouldn't be here this morning. There'd be no joyous hymns or Lord's Prayer together or Hallelujah Chorus. But what else would be missing from your life without that Easter claim that, "Jesus is risen"?

In the midst of our frantic lives, is this Easter thing we do something we could just as well do without?

Maybe the real question today is not what really happened that morning. Maybe the better question is what difference does it make in our lives?

I mean, does Easter change how you see the world and think about life, your life?

We're so trained to measure the worth of our lives by what we can get done, achieve, buy, accumulate, control. Success is measured by title, position, net worth, the number of years you live and flat-screens you own. Does Easter change that definition of life and human worth?

Could it be that Easter is really about a different validation of our lives? That what Mary experienced that morning, and what countless others have experienced since, including you and I... is a Great, Divine, Easter "Yes" to our lives.

That first Easter morning Mary understood it... that Jesus was put on this earth for a reason, so that we each might believe there's a great reason for our own lives too. And that great reason is to know and live the extravagant love of God which can heal the world. A love capable of defying every power of human brokenness and fear, even the fear of death.

Mary went to the tomb believing that nothing really matters after all, including her own life, because in the end all there is... is suffering and death. But something happened that morning and she came back proclaiming that the crosses and tombs of this life do not have the last word.

Could that be the essence of Easter then? That the last word is always God's word and will of love. That with God nothing of love is lost.

And Mary now knew this because she had seen the risen Jesus, who is the enduring sign of God's unbounded love....

But what did Mary see? What did the Easter Jesus look like?

Maybe, though, the real question is, what does the Easter Jesus look like today, or tomorrow, the day after, or the day after that?

Isn't that why Mary's proclamation - "I have seen the Lord" - became a world changing Easter chorus? Because people began to see a little bit of Jesus in each other and in everyone, and it changed everything.

Mary saw Jesus in the gardener, and later two disciples saw Jesus in a stranger on the road, then they saw Jesus in each other as they broke and shared bread, and then others began reporting that they had seen Jesus too in friends and foreigners.

And it spread, like a spiritual wildfire. People searching every face, just in case. People seeing Jesus, something of God, in one another and in the most unexpected others.

And so it went, from Mary to the disciples to strangers and across every human boundary - this powerful Easter thing, this seeing Jesus everywhere.

So that Jesus is recognized in the stranger who holds the elevator door for you; and in the person at work or school you'd love to hate; in the face of the person at the coffee place who makes your nonfat latte'; in the tear-streaked face of the child who falls on the sidewalk; in the grief-stricken face of a neighbor who's beloved life

partner has died; in the look of terrified confusion of the one with Alzheimer's; in the defiant eyes of the young person covered with piercings; in the voice of the mother who comes to church seeking help with the rent so that she and her children aren't evicted again.

Easter is not about dead bones literally rising up – is it? Easter is about seeing something in the face of another – a sacredness, which has something to do with Jesus, which then has everything to do with a God of extraordinary love.

Or there's the face in the news magazine of the mother in the Sudan pleading for food for her children. And you look at her eyes wide with desperation and you hear the words, as clearly as if Jesus was right beside you: "As you do for the least of these you do for me." Because maybe Jesus, as Christ, a living revelation of God... is...right beside you.

Or among the countless TV images of war, there's the anguished face of the Afghani man pushing an old wheelbarrow in which lies the crumpled dead body of his son, and you gasp, "Oh, Jesus...."

Or you find yourself looking into the mirror one morning, face to face with a human being just as imperfect and vulnerable, sometimes confident and sometimes afraid, as any human being can be. But this day you see something else as well. That your life, in all its humanity, is an incomprehensible gift, really. That you are no less than miracle, finally.

And then you hear yourself say out loud, "Thank you, Jesus."

See, something powerful happened that first, fine Easter...which happens still – doesn't it?