

April 21, 2019
Never Discount the Joy!
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Matthew 28:1-10

The Sabbath was over, and it was almost daybreak on Sunday when Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. ² Suddenly a strong earthquake struck, and the Lord's angel came down from heaven. He rolled away the stone and sat on it. ³ The angel looked as bright as lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. ⁴ The guards shook from fear and fell down, as though they were dead.

⁵ The angel said to the women, "Don't be afraid! I know you are looking for Jesus, who was nailed to a cross. ⁶ He isn't here! God has raised him to life, just as Jesus said he would. Come, see the place where his body was lying. ⁷ Now hurry! Tell his disciples that he has been raised to life and is on his way to Galilee. Go there, and you will see him. That is what I came to tell you."

⁸ The women were frightened and yet very happy, as they hurried from the tomb and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹ Suddenly Jesus met them and greeted them. They went near him, held on to his feet, and worshiped him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus said, "Don't be afraid! Tell my followers to go to Galilee. They will see me there."

Have you ever made the mistake of letting yourself be relieved that some crazy episode of your life was over, just to find out it wasn't? Once upon a time, I had a five-year-old and a nine-month-old baby who nursed morning, noon, and night. Also, my mom was really, really sick. I was sure that's why I felt so exhausted all the time. Then I got queasy. Then I realized I hadn't had a period forever. In my denial, I was convinced it was because I was nursing all the time.

Have you ever been amazed, because that next thing was so much better than anything you might have imagined for yourself? In my case, I was pregnant – again. Where would we be without Emily?

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary go to the graveyard inclined to imagine that the hardest part was over. They'd seen him arrested, tortured, killed, and buried. They arrive at the grave under heavy guard against disciples like themselves. In chapter 27, Pilate agreed with Temple leadership to guard the grave so disciples can't steal the body and make Jesus their martyr. There's an earthquake. And angels. And guards who fall down dead from fear. Unlike their brother Peter, who always comes up with something to say in such sacred spaces, Mary and the other Mary do not say a word. I like believing it is because no words suffice.

Let's pray: *You have come back to us from the land of death, and we don't begin to know how to speak of it. May our fearlessness suffice. Amen.*

Here's something I wonder: I wonder if, when Mary Magdalene saw and heard the angels, she wondered if her demons had come back. I wonder if she wondered, when Jesus spoke to her, if he was real; if he was a dream; or if he was the return of her nightmares. I wonder if she wondered, even for a moment, if Jesus having left her meant her healing was gone too?

This thing that we profess believing – Jesus rising from the dead – you do know, it sounds to some like mental illness? *I was in a garden graveyard and both some angels and Jesus spoke to me.* Depending on your provider, you may get medicine for saying that or asked to lead a Bible class.

Matthew says Mary and the other Mary were both afraid and full of joy. I like imagining them pregnant with these fraternal twins, fear and joy. Snuggled together in their mamas' hearts, sucking one another's thumbs. Fear has its pleasures, don't you know? And joy its terrors too. They are not always as different as they seem. Both are thrilling. Both are the feeling of something about to be, but not yet. Something imagined but not confirmed. And there is pleasure and terror in the not knowing – and longing. Did any part of Mary Magdalene and the other Mary imagine that their beloved friend would be there to greet them? Was it too fantastic even to say out loud?

In John, the women go to anoint his body. Here they go empty-handed. It's dangerous to be there; they go anyway. They are terrified; they go anyway. Maybe they have no idea why they go; and yet, they go anyway. We can't discount their joy, I think, however afraid we would have been. They let joy drive them to the graveyard that day, when fear might just as easily have had the wheel.

Joy drives Easter, friends. Not death. Not fear. Not anxiety. Not anxiety's little sister, stress. All four were put to death on Good Friday, so now life and joy and grace persist! Joy! Rightly celebrated, Easter marks our transfiguration. Rightly practiced, church – our life together – bears witness to our transfiguration. To be human is to be set free by the love of God in Jesus Christ. Free from death. Free from the fear of death. So death has no say-so over us. Death does not drive our day. Death does not drive our hearts and minds.

Easter ought to be the easiest Sunday to preach, except I don't know the words. *“I know this is going to sound crazy”* is the truest and yet worst thing I can think of to say. *I know the world appears to be going to hell in a handbasket right now, but there is no reason to be afraid. God loves us more than we can imagine, you see. And has worked the whole thing out.*

We are not by ourselves here. Not left to our own wits or strength. There is room for us to be SOOO courageous, since our futures have been secured: to love each other hugely; to get all up in evil's face; to do right by the least of these; to ease other people's suffering; to take up their causes, so they might taste the goodness of the Lord this side of the veil. I told you it would sound crazy. And still, they are the truest words I have.

Finally, I suppose, I don't understand anything that has to do with God, Yet, somehow in my bones I know God loves what God made. And when we watch for it, we see it everywhere, this love of God seeping from the very pores of time and space.

I saw a baby at the store this week, who kept waving at a stranger. "Hi!" the baby said. "Hello!" said the stranger back. But the baby wasn't finished. After three or four *hi/hellos*, the stranger was transfigured into a goofy woman playing peekaboo behind a post in the middle of the Target store. The baby would just die laughing. They didn't know each other five minutes earlier.

I could cry at the perfect holy joy of it. It's tiny. It's silly. Then again, Easter lends itself entirely to the language of fools. May our joy suffice.

Would you pray with me?