

Sermon 21.04.04

EASTER

Mark 16: 1-8

When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought 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. They had been saying to one another, 'Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?' When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, 'Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.' So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

INTRO to gospel reading:

In its original form, Mark's gospel, this oldest of our 4 gospels, ends very differently than the gospels of Matthew, Luke and John which were written later. I invite you to settle into *this* telling of our story. Here, in Mark's gospel, the last words of Jesus were "Eloi, eloi, lama sabachthani" - my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? In *this* gospel Jesus dies with a question on his lips. Then, we're told, his body is taken away by Joseph of Arimathea, wrapped in a linen shroud, and placed in a tomb hewn out of rock, the women watching, from a distance, as a large stone was rolled across the entrance.

So take a deep breath, settle in, lay down all the other Easter morning stories, put down for a few moments what you know about what comes next, and listen, be curious, pay attention, as we follow the women into the early dawn of that Sunday morning.

## SERMON

Earlier this week I sat in a cozy chair, book in one hand, a mug of chai in the other, and began by giving thanks for that cup of tea - thank you Lord, for the milk, the cows, the farmers who tend them. God, bless those who grow the tea, the spices... bless those who tend the sugar cane that sweetens this cup. And Lord, thank you for the cracklers who keep my house warm.

I stopped. What just was whispered in this prayer of gratitude? Thank you for the cracklers? Those men and women I have at times demonized, marching in rallies to stop their work that ravages the earth?

LIFE IS COMPLICATED! Giving thanks is complicated.

So is Joy.

Jan Richardson, artist, author and Methodist minister, writes: Joy can get complicated.

She says, often, when joy comes to us, when joy *comes* to us,(note the sense of gift), when it comes it is accompanied by other emotions that seem to be in conflict but somehow enter our lives all mixed together: joy *and* sorrow *and* gratitude *and* grief *and*...

yet when we think about joy being complicated, Richardson invites us to think not only about how joy shows up in the midst of other emotions. A *complicated* joy has to do with an older sense of what *complicate* means. *Complicate* has its roots in Latin words that mean *to fold together*, as when a recipe calls for an ingredient to be incorporated into the mix: an intentional introduction of a substance that is brought into concert with everything else in the bowl. The word refers to more than simply combining things; *it*

gets at how they become intertwined and entangled.

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9ua8daJpmb> use this video of mixing ingredients- starts around 35 seconds)

when it comes to joy being complicated, it's not just that our emotions get bound up with each other, so tangled they cannot be separated, it's that we are bound together, linked together, folded together so inextricably that we are forever changed. *A complicated joy* means that joy is born of those connections between ourselves and with God. Our joy is not isolated. Joy is experienced in relationship - to God, to other people and animals, to things found in our natural and everyday world. Joy may be felt in times alone -in the experience of God in the quiet of the woods, or found in the presence of others - noisy, boisterous celebrations, or perhaps, a shared, silent smile.<sup>1</sup>

For theologian and author, Angela Gorell, "Joy is the presence of God ministering to us". Joy can always find us, even in the midst of sorrow and suffering. Because when we suffer, we're longing for connection and meaning...<sup>2</sup> Here, in our gospel story today - the women came to minister to Jesus, minister by caring for his dead body, and yet, and yet, instead they meet a young man, are seized by fear and amazement, and experience God's presence ministering to them through his strange words: 'Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him.'

These women Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome (Sal -oh-me) - they were suffering, grieving, longing for a much different ending to the journey of the past 3 years.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://sanctuaryofwomen.com/WomensChristmasRetreat2021.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Webinar on joy with Angela Gorrell and Michaela ODonnell Long (3/25/21)

Joy is a gift. Complicated joy is a complicated gift, a folding and mixing of connection with God right in the midst of our messy lives.

Joy is considered one of the scariest emotions we feel. We're afraid that moment when we sense a deep connection; we're afraid that moment is going to go away, and we want to hold onto it forever.

It takes courage to open ourselves to receive that profound connection with God and other, knowing it's like trying to hold onto a handful of water... it slips through our fingers and we're left with the feeling of wetness on the skin. (IMAGE??)

Just as the women showed up at the tomb that early morning, open to hearing something terrifyingly new, we, too, can open ourselves to receive; to be found by God's gift of joy.

In her book *The Gravity of Joy*<sup>3</sup>, Gorrell writes of becoming findable. Findable by God's joy, that joy found in the midst of loss, fear, grief.

After experiencing 4 deaths in her family in a matter of months - through suicide, addiction and unexpected illness, Angela found her way out of grief by volunteering as a chaplain in a women's prison. It's there, in the midst of complicated pain, that she led a weekly bible study with the women, creating a space for the stories of their lives to be told. And in holding those fragments of broken lives, with one another, she found joy. Complicated joy, mixing the pain and brokenness of their lives into God's ministering presence - right there among them.

Engaging. Engaging, in deeply honest ways, is one way Gorrell writes of becoming findable by God's joy. Telling stories is another way of creating space for joy - God's ministering to us.

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<sup>3</sup> Gorrell, Angela. 2021. *The Gravity of Joy: A Story of Being Lost and Found*. Eerdmans, William B. Publishing.

Our brains are wired to easily remember negative experiences. We have to work harder to remember joyful ones, have to be more intentional in Welcoming joy.

Our gospel story ends with the women running from that open tomb - it was the beginning of a story that, eventually, would be shared again and again.

But here, in the telling, the women step through the threshold, into the darkness of the cave, expecting death, expecting that the ritual of caring for the dead will be carried out, that their grief will find expression in this act of caring for Jesus' body one, last, time. But that's not what they find. Here, instead, is a young man who says 'look - this place is empty, what you're looking for is no longer here'. And then he gives a command, a command that holds the complicated joy, the joy that is both grief and hope, the joy that is God ministering to them. This joy is held in a single word: Go. Go, he tells them. Go, tell the others, go - go to Galilee. Go to Galilee - Galilee was far away, it would have taken a hard 3 days of walking to get there from Jerusalem. Galilee, the place where this all started. Galilee, the place where the disciples were called to follow Jesus; Galilee, the place of miracles and connections and stories. They are commanded: Go. Make the long, tiring walk back to Galilee, to where we began, and I'll meet you there - that's the message Jesus gave those women, the women holding bags weighed down with spice meant for the dead.

Fear and amazement filled those 3 women; other translations say: bewilderment and trembling. They ran, on their way, afraid.

Afraid. That's the way this gospel story ends. They didn't say anything. They fled. They didn't stand there, frozen in their terror. No. They ran.

Complicated joy - bewilderment and trembling; fear and amazement. Hope and grief, all folded into one.

These women, on this first Easter morning, show us what it is to live into complicated joy. They were afraid, they said nothing at first, yet they followed that command : GO. Go, go holding all those feelings and follow this next step - I will meet you there.

There's so much joy in that promise - Jesus will meet them. They must journey alone this time, make the long trek to Galilee, but with the whisper of hope that death has not had the last word.

They left the empty tomb behind, in search of the One who goes ahead of us.

And so it is with us. We are called, where ever we find ourselves, whether it's in the darkness of a cave reeking of death, or the bewilderment of unexpected visitors, we are called to go.

This joy that Jesus offers requires courage. It's found when we step out of the empty spaces of our lives and mix ourselves into the Divine - and that happens in the most unexpected of places. Go. Go. Step out into your lives, Jesus is waiting to meet you there.