

I speak to you in the name of our Creator, the Risen Christ and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The light is just beginning to stretch across the horizon, and the world still carries the weight of what has happened. The women walk toward the tomb with spices in their hands and grief in their bodies. They move with love that has nowhere to go except into the quiet work of tending what remains.

As we have journeyed through Lent, I invited you to keep a daily journal of lament and gratitude. To keep finding reasons for gratitude even in grief, to keep trusting that God's creative energy is still at work in the ruins. That is resurrection-shaped joy. In our reading today we heard, "They left the tomb with fear and great joy." This phrase kept running through my heart and mind this week. I was thinking more about the joy part than the fear. After all, it's Easter, and Christ is Risen. But when I read the passage through a few times, I noticed that fear is mentioned four times.

"For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men." I assume this means they kinda fainted. Now the guards are there (a detail only told in Matthew) to make sure the disciples don't steal away the body of Jesus and falsely claim he had risen. Love the irony here.

And "So they (Mary Magdalene and the other Mary; not sure which one here as there are many mentioned in the Gospels) left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy and ran to tell his disciples."

And twice Mary and Mary are told "Do not be afraid", Once by the angel, and once by Jesus.

So fear is a natural reaction to something so extraordinary, so supernatural, so outside of our experience and understanding. The poor guards faint. It's no wonder that the angel and then Jesus assure the women, "Do not be afraid." That's a common message, from both angels and Jesus. And still the women leave with fear and joy. The two can coexist. I wonder if the fear had changed from fearing that extraordinary supernatural power to something else. I wonder if it had shifted to awe? Then again, maybe it was fear of daring to belief again. Maybe both. We are after all, very complex beings who can hold multiple and even competing emotions at once.

The women had arrived at the tomb with spices and deep grief and left with fear and joy. Joy is a very resilient emotion. Have you ever noticed that happiness and grief can't exist together, but joy and grief can. That's because happiness depends on circumstances, but joy doesn't. Especially if your joy is found in God.

Rowan Williams speaks about the particular nature of our lives, how love and loss are always specific, always shaped by real relationships and real stories. Joy comes to us in that same particular way. It arrives in moments we can name and remember—a piece of music, a glimpse of beauty, a moment of connection, a quiet sense of being held. It comes as something we receive. We can't manufacture it. We can't buy it. It is a gift from God, just like grace. It comes in those moments of gratitude, doesn't it? As you thought about lament and gratitude the past few weeks, I wonder if the hard brittle edges of the grief were softened a bit for you. They were for me.

Kate Bowler describes joy as a kind of sturdy presence, a defiant insistence that our unfinished lives are still held in love. Joy lives alongside the ache of being

human, close enough to touch, close enough to breathe the same air. And that's what we begin to see in the resurrection. Joy moving within grief. Joy arising within lives that are still becoming. Joy meeting us in the particular, in the granular details of our days.

For there is a tension in the resurrection. Yes, Jesus has risen, but,

1. His followers only get brief moments with him. It's not like Lazarus whom Jesus raised from the dead to live out the rest of his natural life with his loved ones.
2. Jesus still does not overthrow Rome and establish an earthly kingdom.
3. Despite the amazing joy of the resurrection, they are still not receiving what they had hoped for.

Wendell Berry writes, "Be joyful, though you have considered all the facts." I love that. He describes a defiant resilient joy. This joy grows from seeing life in all its fullness, and from trusting deeply that God is present in every moment we experience. Paul gives us language for this mystery: "Your life is hidden with Christ in God." Hidden, held, sustained within a love that surrounds and fills every part of our lives. And so we practice a both/and faith. We give voice to lament. And we offer gratitude. We name what is broken and we notice what is beautiful. We pray with honesty, and we live with attentiveness. We begin to understand more deeply what it means to say, "We are an Easter People."

We are people who live within the unfolding of resurrection, people who carry stories that hold both longing and joy, people who walk forward with hearts open to the ways God continues to create and renew.

This morning, we see that resurrection power at work in a very specific, human way in the life of Reese. As he stands before us to reaffirm his baptismal vows, he is not merely updating a record; he is stepping into the fullness of the name God has called him by. He is living out the promise that we are all made in God's image, which includes maleness, femaleness, and all the unfathomable ways in between, and that in Christ, we are all being remade. His journey reminds us that resurrection is not just a future hope, but a present reality where we are invited to shed the old skins of who we were told to be and rise into who we truly are.

A couple of weeks ago as we stood at the empty tomb of Lazarus, I asked you what areas of your life needed resurrection? What tombs could the Holy One break you out of and where you needed rebirth? I hope you have been pondering that question and have been talking to God about it. Jesus calls you by name and invites you into light and life abundant, from death to resurrection. For beloved community, we are an Easter people! Even at the grave we make our song, Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

Indeed, Alleluia, Christ is Risen!