

LOOKING FOR LIFE

The Rev. Geoff Parker to Foreside Community Church - Falmouth, ME

Sunday, April 21, 2019

Scripture: [Luke 24:1–12](#)

SERMON

The Women

As it has been throughout the three holy days that we call the Triduum, we rely on the women of Jesus's life to be the observers and witnesses of the action. Maybe led by Mary of Galilee, Jesus's mother, we are shown their commitment that does not waiver even as the disciples we remember by name have scattered in despair and fear. The women have stood by the cross as Jesus breathed his last, they have wrapped and laid his body. The women have rested on the sabbath in their grief before today.

And so they come to the tomb this morning, with their hearts broken, but also broken open as they commit themselves to anointing Jesus's body: tenderly washing him, caring for him, and grieving him.

Probable vs. Possible

So much of the story of Jesus's last week, his death, his resurrection, hangs on what people think is probable and what might be possible.

In some versions of the story, as Jesus marched into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, the religious leaders of the temple debated with themselves about what to do. They thought it was possible Jesus might cause a revolution... just probably not a successful one... They wanted to be on the right side of history. The disciples loved the possibility of Jesus as messiah, the possibility of hope, and yet Good Friday comes and reminds them of how improbable all that hope stuff might be... and they scatter to the winds.

The Change of Looking

See, here's the thing the women teach us... to see the resurrection, you have to go to the tomb. You have to look inside it to see even the possibility that Jesus **is not there**.

The authorities and empire want everyone to count on probabilities: on the everyday-ness of brutality, and despair, and hopelessness. They roll a stone in front of the tomb to say: case closed, nothing to see here... Jesus might have some sort of dream of God's future, they say, but his dreams die just as easy as anyone else's.

Probabilities will always lead you to turn your back, and not look at where your heart might be broken. That kind of looking away is different from hope... it's a kind of empty "thinking positive" that keeps us from feeling, and from growing.

No, these first preachers, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, their friends, and Jesus's mother teach us today... the very first step of resurrection is to not be afraid to look into the tomb... because right there in that looking is the very possibility... *He is not here, he is risen*. Can you imagine the improbability but the amazing *truth* of those angels, those words?

You have to bravely *look* to find the possibility of new life. Even when so much of the world wants to tell you how very improbable resurrection is. Sometimes we do this shorthand: "The first step is admitting you have a problem." The first step is seeing where your heart is broken, because there is the glimmer of Easter possibility.

One of our great theologians of music, Leonard Cohen's famous line from his song, *Anthem*, is here:

| *There's a crack in everything / that's how the light gets in.*

That's exactly the Jesus story of this Holy Week: the site and situation of the worst brokenness and injustice creates the tiniest spark and glimmer of possibilities for re-creation... and what God can do with sparks and possibilities is more than we could ask or imagine... it is in fact the re-imagination of all that is.

Tombs and Cracks Today

Where do you need to look at what is lost to find the possibility of new life?

This looking is sometimes very small, sometimes as simple as acknowledging things that do not give, or have robbed us of life. I was talking this through with a young person... it is a really tricky thing to discover those activities in your life that maybe you just have to let go so you can discover what will bring you new life... a new skill, new thing to learn, new friendship.

Sometime it is the scale of our lives: having to acknowledge a life-long loss or grief... in order to see where our lives will lead in the "great hereafter."

Sometimes, the looking is global. The best examples I can think of are the kind of movements like the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in post-apartheid South Africa, or the group of the same name here in Maine working on telling the truth of our relations with the Wabanaki. You have to see and name what has been lost... what has been done, to make the possibility of new life and justice.

This week, in which we celebrate new Easter fire, fire has captured so much of our attention. At a global scale, we experienced a small fire in the Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem, and the large roof fire at Notre Dame de Paris. Notre Dame is a hub for so much life, in Paris, in France, in Europe, in the world, in faith that it was top of the news. So many people shared photos of their time there, wondering at the art, the structure, the history.

This global grief showed two signs of life: It turns out, since this is not the first time a new roof has been required at Notre Dame... when the last oaks were cut to make the spire, there were oak trees that were planted at Versailles to be the next beams and roof. ^[1]

Even more, looking at the fire at Notre Dame also did something else amazing: it lit up the awareness of three historically black churches which burned in St. Landry Parish, Louisiana in the week prior. Their buildings destroyed by an alleged arson and hate crime, the churches found themselves the recipient of all of the hope for rebuilding and new life that the fires had stirred up in world. They had almost 2 million dollars raised by the end of the week.

Richard Rohr, the Franciscan mystic has often said:

| *God loves things by becoming them. - Richard Rohr*

In the incarnation, Jesus shows us how much God loves us, by becoming us, sharing this life: its joys, its pains, its possibilities, and even its finality with us. But then at Easter, God shows a different kind of love: love of the impossible, love of not just human life, but *new life*. So that we might always be able to look to learn more about God by looking towards those things of new life and hope in our own lives.

May we be people who are unafraid to go with friends to look for where the hurt may be deepest, that we may be part of God's resurrection transformation. Saying yet again:

Christ is risen!

Christ is risen indeed!