

KGL+
Sermon
Trinity Church Boston
Easter Vigil
April 8, 2023

In the name of our Creator, our Redeemer, and our Sustainer, Amen.

It was the first day of school—and as a new teacher, I sat at the registration table early in the morning waiting for our students to arrive. My new colleague, the Chair of the Math department, strolled into the registration area, cup of coffee in hand, found a nearby chair and made himself comfortable. Once the new arrivals started to walk in, off he went, cup of coffee still in hand, still warm, it was that short a wait.

And then it happened again the following year—the next first day of school. In he strolled again, took a look around the registration area, and seeing that we had two students signing in, off he went, nonplussed.

Knowing him better that second year, and having worked alongside him as a coach, I rustled up the mojo to ask him about this not **quite** odd, but not **quite** normal behavior, wandering in for a few minutes only to wander back out when it got a bit busy.

In a delightfully wry Welsh accent, he explained to me that there was a feasible statistic and probability that in any given year, the same confluence of factors which allowed for all of our students to show up on the same day of school, could also coalesce in such a way so that the opposite might occur: that no students would show up on that first day of school. It could be due to students choosing not to attend that particular school quite late in the game; or travel plans might have universally gone awry; parents deciding differently; perhaps the state would just shut down (which is not outside the realm of possibility, as we know now).

No matter what the reason, he said, there was the potential that we would all assemble at the registration tables on that very day, at that very time, and that it was mathematically possible that no one would show up. And that every year—and he had been doing this for the better part of two decades at this time—he came to the registration room to see if that tiny statistical chance might have come true. He wasn't rooting for an empty school—he was wondering if he would be present for something, in his framework anyways, rather magnificent.

Imagine showing up annually, just to see if something completely ridiculous and statistically egregious were to come true **this year**. Imagine that, church.

“After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb.”

As Michael Battle mentioned yesterday in his Good Friday sermon, each Gospel frames the death and resurrection of Jesus in particular ways, even though we tend to conflate them in our minds into one of whole cloth. Each one—though following a familiar arc—holds its own

peculiarities and its own vision of what happened, and somehow between the truths of these various authors, we find our own truth—how this story called each of the participants, and still calls to us.

And we are told this year in the Gospel of Matthew, that Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. There is no mention of burial spices brought along, no mention of their intent to anoint and wrap the body, no worry about rolling the stone away from the tomb, and how that would be accomplished, as there are in other versions of this story. They simply went—at dawn of the first day—to see the tomb.

There are seven different Greek verbs for ‘seeing’ used in the Gospels. The Marys were there to *theoreo* the tomb—to observe, to watch, to see from a distance in a way one might theorize, or watch theatre. Their hands were empty. They didn’t come to work, or tend, or do, or attend to the pragmatics of death.

They were there to *theoreo*: to show up and see if the resurrection had, indeed, occurred.

There is a meaningful difference between showing up expecting death, and showing up and hoping for resurrection.

Only three days after the shame-filled, haunting and violent end to the life of Jesus, no matter how moving we portray it to be, Jesus’ disciples were in hiding and in fear. This was on purpose, Empire reinforcing its power through threat of painful and humiliating death. To imagine that with Jesus’ death came the end of his ministry, and therefore God’s promise to humanity through him, as well as the promise of the gift of grace, wasn’t entirely unreasonable. When we are scared, we shut down. When we are shamed, we shut down. When we are told we hold no dignity or value, as the Roman powers delighted in showcasing, we shut down.

What kind of conversation happened between those two women, early on that morning, do you imagine? What kind of profound curiosity—or faithfulness—or desperate, foolish hope-- do we think they felt as they made the plan to walk out into the dark of morning, nothing in hand, to see if the promise of Jesus was perhaps true—that perhaps there was more than this life, more than death, more than all the reasons to stay locked inside an upper room.

Arriving to the tomb with spices to acknowledge and sanctify death would have been the appropriate response. It is the pragmatic one, and the way we cope with grief and disappointment in so many ways, busying ourselves with being productive, solving the perceived problem at hand.

And yet these Marys are not pragmatic this year. They don’t try to erase their grief or disappointment, or salve it through going back to how it used to be. In the midst of it all, they show up seeking the resurrection. Cautiously anticipating something magnificent, and impossible, and foolish, to happen. For something to break through, and point them to the place where **this** is not all there is, not all there can and will be, and yet even in the midst of the ordinariness of **this**, God still shows up.

The resurrection is nothing but the fantastic belief that our very beings are not bought and sold through fear and power, but that in God's triumph over death, and coming through death to life again, we are set free. We are not bound and limited by a world frantically pacing itself to outrun and escape death, but are the ones who get up in the dark of a morning, hearts wrenched and wrung out, and choose to leave our herbs at home, and walk silently with our loved ones to *theoreo* the tomb because we believe that there is a chance—as egregiously small as it might be—there is a chance that that tomb will be empty.

We baptize this holy evening. Through water and chrism, this is the night where generations of the heirs of the Mary Magdalenes and Marys seeking Jesus have come here armed only with a dogged sense of hope that they might encounter something pointing them beyond what we know, and into what we long for. In all of the baptismal promises we make, in all of the outer actions we affirm as followers of a descended-and-died-and-risen God, in all of the creeds and sacraments in which we partake, in the ways we pray and kneel and come out of this place elated or frustrated or confused, in all of what we do as the body of Christ, we hold on to one deep belief: we show up again and again because the tomb might be empty.

We show up because there is a marvelously tiny, delicious, statistical possibility that one of these days we will not only *theoreo* the resurrection—we, ourselves, will carry the Good News of it throughout the streets of Boston and beyond, proclaiming with fear and great joy that we are the confluence of factors leading to this moment, that we are heralds, each of us, even if we don't fully understand what we have seen—but it will have been worth showing up, again, and again and again, to witness in death-defying, light embracing hope, what might be.

So see you again here, next year, friends.

Amen.