

“Behind Closed Doors”
Resurrection of Our Lord – April 12, 2020 – Matthew 28:1-10

After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, ‘Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, “He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.” This is my message for you.’ So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them and said, ‘Greetings!’ And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshipped him. Then Jesus said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.’ Mt 28:1-10

Grace and peace to you from God, the Creator, and from our Risen Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

It started with a letter to Captain Meriwether Lewis, the resetting of America. The letter read, *“The object of your mission is to explore the Missouri River and such principal stream of it, as by its course and communication with the waters of the Pacific Ocean...may offer the most direct and practicable water communication across the continent for the purposes of commerce.* The letter was signed, Thomas Jefferson.

Lewis and Clark and the Corps of Discovery trekked across the America of 1803, exploring the Louisiana Purchase territory to find the route from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean that everyone *just knew* was there. Why? Because discovering and claiming this watery highway would mean controlling the vast natural resources of our continent. A feat like that today, accomplished, would be like *owning* the internet.

It had been almost a year and a half since they traveled the river past Kansas City, and now they had reached the icy cold spring that was the origin of the Mighty Missouri River. Lewis was poised to realize the dream, believing that just over the hill was the Northwest Passage. He was wrong. Author Tod Bolsinger continues, “What Lewis actually discovered was that 300 years of experts had all been completely and utterly wrong. In front of him was *not* a gentle slope down to a navigable river running to the Pacific Ocean -- but the Rocky Mountains – stretching out for miles and miles as far as the eyes could see...One set of peaks after another...and at that moment, everything that Meriwether Lewis assumed about his journey *changed*. He was planning on exploring the new world *by boat*. He was a river explorer...but the Corps of Discovery Expedition was about to go off the map into uncharted territory.” And Lewis and Clark had to decide whether to pack up and go back to their normal lives, or sell their canoes, lay off their river explorers, buy some horses and hire people who knew about mountains. The old ways were not going to work; and no one knew how they should best go forward.

It started with a virus, the resetting of the globe. And where are the people? Behind closed doors. It started with an earthquake, the resetting of history. Where were his people? Behind closed doors. The believers, yes, even the disciples, were *not* together, celebrating, on the very first Easter. And, as a matter of fact, when they finally *saw* the risen Christ, it was not because they found Him, but that Jesus came to them – and met his people in groups of “ten or less” - a handful of women at the tomb, ten disciples locked in the

upper room where they had shared their Last Supper with him, two travelers on the road to Emmaus: he came to them. Yes, the first Easter was all darkness and fear and grief coming closer and closer. So, on this Easter morning - we, too, enter uncharted territory - perhaps better able to imagine ourselves at the cemetery with the women, rather than attending a polished church production that we've come to expect. The one we have always known as "Easter."

Today's story might have sounded a little less familiar to most of you, because Matthew has some amazing details that are uniquely his. First, there's that earthquake... caused by the descent from heaven of a Messenger from God who rolls back the great stone and sits on it! (Nowhere else are there witnesses to the stone as it is being rolled away. It's already that way when folks arrive.) And this angel's appearance is so glorious, so other-worldly, that the guards shake and faint dead away, so they miss what this Messenger from God had to say. Hear it this way, from the NEB: *"You have nothing to fear. I know you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; he has been raised as he said he would be. Come and see the place where he was laid, and then go quickly, and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead and is going on before you into Galilee; there you will see him.' That is what I had to tell you."* So, the women LEAVE the tomb, with awe and great joy, on a mission from God, running to tell the disciples. And suddenly, the Resurrected Jesus MEETS them, and GREETs them, and they fall at his feet in worship. *Do not be afraid. Go, tell my brothers.* You kind of wonder why Jesus felt the need to tell them exactly what that pretty cool angel had already shared. *GO! To Galilee (!?)* Why not to the High Priest, to Herod, to Pilate?! But this time Jesus is specific. *Go tell my brothers to leave for Galilee. There they will see me.* Please note these two details: these two women were already going, already jazzed to share their witness - the testimony of two, admissible in court - but probably wondering deep down if "the brothers" would believe them. Notice that Jesus does not need to say, "don't be afraid" until they stopped, and really took in that Jesus was **alive**. And for that kind of proclamation, you might just need Jesus to have your back.

Isn't it curious that Jesus would not be found by them anywhere but Galilee? Not in the Temple. Not where the governmental and political and religious posturing had reached a fever pitch at Passover - but in the Galilee - out there where the world was. Out there where people are waiting for a new life.

In his morning reflection, Bishop Roger said, in fact, that that we know very little about Jesus' first 30 years before he began his 3 years of ministry. What we assume is that (with the exception of a few pilgrimage trips to Jerusalem in the south each year for the festivals, Jesus lived and worked in the north - in and around Nazareth, in Galilee. In Matthew, Galilee is sort of a code word for "Anytown." It was there where crops were grown, where fish were caught. It was near a trade route and it was full of real people with everyday, ordinary lives. It was a symbol for the whole world.

"Do not be afraid; go and tell the brothers to (meet me in the world) - there they will see me." Apparently, one place you can always see God is in the world. For the brothers and sisters it started with the world God so loved. It was time. Because, in a very real way, Resurrection isn't fulfilled until the people participate in it... And how does one "participate" in Resurrection?

One of the Lenten devotion books around our house is called, *The City is My Monastery*, and one of the stories told is about a group that supports homeless and vulnerable people in London. The author meets with them weekly in a time they call

“Spiritual Space. One time, as they read the Easter story together, he asked them to imagine being a disciple coming to the tomb in the wee hours - at dawn - after having witnessed the agony of Jesus’ death. Then he tells them that Jesus has just walked towards them, alive and well. “*What would you ask him?*” he asks the group to imagine. “*And what will he reply?*” A very practical down-to-earth woman replied, “Well, I’d ask him – ***Jesus, how are you doing?***” And what did he say? She answers, “He said: ***So far, so good.***”

What an authentic and wise conversation! It’s not the “*how ya doin’?*” you drop on someone as you pass and don’t even wait for, or expect a response. It’s “How are you ***doing?***” I mean, Jesus has just gone through betrayal, crucifixion and death, and now he has been raised by God and come out of a tomb! You might want to sit down and hear that story that needs to be told and listened to. You might have stories of your own that also need telling - about loss, or struggles or loneliness, wounds or fears. You might even share a tiny Resurrection story of your own. ***How are you doing?*** seems like a wonderful place to start sharing hope.

Finally, the Jesus in the woman’s mind’s eye, is not glib or overly naïve. He’s been through a lot of late, and he has just come out of the tomb of death. His answer of *So far so good* is not only for the present, but it is the start of a whole new story, a mission into uncharted territory. There is no script to transform his followers into witnesses that will inspire a community to build a church in the midst of his enemies, that will sew peace and love and hope until the world knows peace on earth. *So far so good* knows that we’ve come a long way, but we still have a long way to go. It also says that we have a calling to go on. And we will not go forward alone. We are going with God.

The Resurrection of Jesus – the One who revealed God to us in a way we could understand – was another golden opportunity for us created ones to recognize our need for the Creator. Easter is always another chance at doing life. And this year’s Easter is like a slow, rolling earthquake that is resetting the global community. How will we integrate this current pain into our life and continue our journey into uncharted territory?

What we seem to be rediscovering is that some things will never change: love of family, good friends and neighbors, the beauty of Nature, good food, virtual fellowship, and God’s love for us. That is why Easter is so vital to Christians, NOT just because we get to live eternally in heaven, but because - having Jesus beside us in the world is the source of our greatest strength: **hope** - in the face of our greatest fear. So, go ahead and breathe. Take. The. Time. (After all, even Creation enjoys a sabbath rest.) And yes, we too, **can** Take. The. Time. to bring hope...And isn’t it good to be reminded that the big story is still **The Big Story?** Life. Death. New Life in the world, with Jesus. (So far, so good...) Amen.

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Resources: *Canoeing the Mountains*, Tod Bolsinger, Praxis; Bishop Andy Doyle, Day1 online; *The City is My Monastery*, Richard Carter, Canterbury Press; *Colleagues* (especially Alix Pridgen, Pat Ellison, Bp. Susan Candea, Bp Em. Roger Gustafson); Bob Chell, ELCA Faith Lens for Easter 2020.