

Easter Sunday – 4 April 2010 – The Rev. Madelyn L. Betz

Isaiah 65:17-25 • Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24 • I Corinthians 15:19-26 • John 20:1-18 • Easter • April 4, 2010 • St. Thomas, Hanover, New Hampshire

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

When I was a little girl, Easter to me, besides an Easter basket, meant a new hat and, believe it or not, new white gloves. The first outing for these special items was the Easter sunrise service. It was always chilly outside at 6am, but we gathered nonetheless on our church lawn for the first singing of “Jesus Christ is risen today” and for the reading of one of the resurrection stories. The hat, the gloves and even the first light of dawn were exciting and fun because they were new. Like Christmas, Easter is an occasion that is more fun with children about, because they *also* remind us of the newness of life. In retrospect, my Easter memories also remind me that newness speaks of the promise of possibilities and of shy hope.

On *this* Easter day, we gather as people who have been drawn to possibility and hope. There is much in our world and in our lives to worry about, to be fearful about. Gathering in church on Easter Day is a way of proclaiming that we hope. I believe that our experience of being drawn here today is not so very different from that of Mary Magdalene and the disciples in our Gospel story, who found themselves drawn to Jesus’ tomb. I’d like to identify three commonalities that through our Easter experience join us to these three people.

First, they came even though they did not yet understand. We aren’t gathered here because we already know all the answers, but because we are seekers,

recognizing our weakness and seeking to connect with a life-giving power beyond ourselves. Mary came to the tomb before dawn out of allegiance, fulfilling a duty, doing what she felt she “ought” to do. She put that nudge into action, as you too have done this morning. The action carried then, and carries still a germ of hope, a seed, a desire for belief despite the things we don’t understand.

After hearing Mary’s disturbing words, the disciples came to see for themselves, doubting perhaps, hoping against hope. Mary herself drifted back again after them, unable to stay away, upset, yet returning, even in the face of what she was afraid was true. All felt drawn and put the feeling into action.

The second shared characteristic is that Mary and the disciples came to the tomb armed with courage. For Mary to set out in the dark was an extraordinary thing for a woman of her day to do. After hearing Mary’s news, the disciples reacted quickly, running to the tomb, without considering either danger or consequences. We also come armed with a certain amount of courage. Today is a beautiful day and we lead very busy lives. The world does not honor us for taking the time to be here today. All of us present here this morning, individuals together, form a unique body; we are people drawn into community with others who are seeking. We come today because we dare to believe that the power of death has been conquered in favor of newness of life. Christ in me meets Christ in you and we are a new creation. Because of the empty tomb, we are redeemed from sin and death and can rejoice in a new life, a new life that strengthens us.

Our third common bond with Mary and the two disciples is that they came looking for something. And what they found surprised them. The disciples began to believe because the pieces of Jesus' message began to fit together. For Mary, she required a personal contact, Jesus himself. When Jesus spoke her name and she knew that *he* was present, she went back to the disciples a second time and *announced* her news with a new found surety because of the one who had found *her*.

Easter is our confident celebration of “thy kingdom come.” We gather on a day such as this in a place such as this to affirm our desire and, yes, our belief that there is something more. We come in a shy hope that God's first fruits include us. We come saying “maybe, just maybe” death's power is no more. We participate in hope with all our senses, by our symbols of flowers, candles, gifts and songs. Whether we are young or old in years, we can be assured today that the newness of life within us will never die. “In each of us, deeper than our weakness or our weariness, lies our true self, the part of us that is one with Jesus in his suffering and that is equally at one with him in his rising to new life. The seeds of the resurrection lie buried in each of us, and those seeds are nourished today by bread and wine.” [*Sacred Space*, Ave Maria Press, 2009]

Today is a new day; the first day; the first day of new life. Glory to God for the Easter mystery, that the empty tomb is in fact a life-bearing womb, full of grace. May the risen life of Christ become our own and may he be known to us in the breaking of the bread. Alleluia. Amen.