

# Easter

Alleluia, Christ has risen. Let the light of Christ illuminate your path for us, Creator, redeemer, and sustainer. Amen

As a part of my ordination process, I interned as a hospital Chaplain. It was an intense experience, to say the least, yet taught me a great deal about pastoral care, myself, grief, and caring for the dead and dying. One of the many moments of learning that will always stay with me from that time came from an interaction I had with a young woman and her family. They were trying to decide whether to stay in the hospital or continue her hospice care at home. She was not interested in deep spiritual conversation, she only had one question, “What happens when I die? If she didn’t have a belief system, then what would happen? I asked what she thought would happen and that opened a number of beautiful conversations.

In our gospel text today, we find the witness of Mary Magdalene. Before we hear her witness, we read of Peter and other disciples who go to the tomb and see it empty, then return to their homes.

As Mary gazes into the tomb, she sees angels, and as she questions them, Jesus appears, yet in her grief, Mary does not recognize Jesus at first but sees him as a gardener. It is only when he calls her by name that she sees him for who Jesus is. Mary then goes to tell the disciples she has seen the Lord and shared the good news.

Grief is sneaky. It's been described as waves or love with nowhere to go. Mary's grief and love for Jesus brought her strength to bear witness to Jesus' resurrection.

This is ultimately a story about love. God's love for us, Jesus' love for his friends, and Mary's love for her teacher and God.

We've come a long way on a journey with Jesus to get to this point. We've been with him and his disciples as he washed their feet giving them a new commandment to love one another as he has loved them.

We've heard the story of Jesus' death on the cross and how he was betrayed by some of those very disciples. Yet, knowing that was to happen, Jesus brought reconciliation to his friends. We heard the ancient texts and renewed our baptismal vows and the foundations of our faith as we observed the most ancient of rituals. At the heart of every moment of each part of this journey has been God's unconditional love for us. The grace we receive freely and Jesus' ever-present reminder that he is with us, always. To remember Jesus is to honor him just as we would any of our loved ones.

This text reminds us that what is loved is resurrected.

When we remember our loved ones who have gone before, we not only keep their memories alive, we honor their fullness in the body of Christ as we honor them in our cloud of witnesses. The love we feel for

those who have died rarely diminishes over time. It may transform or find new ways of informing our lives yet those who have impacted our lives stay with us. This is one of many great mysteries of faith, resurrection, and the love God has for us.

My conversations with the patients during my hospital chaplaincy allowed me to lean into a curiosity that I hope never leaves me.

It was a gift of our connection over the deep grief of loss, and the joy of lives lived. Those conversations reminded me of a song I was introduced to during that same internship by a group called the Bengsons. The lyrics are “My joy is heavy oh help me carry the joy that comes at the end of life. At the end of a walking, at the very beginning, this heavy joy that I marry and delight.”

As with the grief we see in Mary as she weeps and then learns Jesus has overcome death. We see her joy in sharing Jesus’ resurrection with the disciples. This is a complex grief around the transition of what it means for Jesus to overcome death. To begin to trust and have faith that the teachings of Jesus will sustain them becomes the ongoing work of the new Christian community and the work we are called to today.

I appreciate this text for giving us the witness of Mary as it is less often that we get to hear women’s voices in our gospel texts.

As we begin the Easter season full of Alleluias and stories of the early Christian community, My hope is that we all continue to remember the lessons we’ve learned during Lent and the last three days.

My prayer for us all is that we don't forget to take the time to slow down, to engage in a deepening of our spiritual connection outside of a liturgical season; remember that the ancient texts are always there for reflection, and love will always be at the heart of the resurrection story.

**Amen**