

Where Will You Find Jesus?

John 20: 1-18

April 12, 2009

Easter Sunday – UM

Will you join me in a moment of prayer?

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts and minds be acceptable in your sight O God, our strength and our redeemer, amen.

I want you to think of moments that are awesome, and full of joy.

When the presence of God was so apparent you could touch it and taste it and feel it...

Perhaps the birth of a child... perhaps sharing a special moment with a soulmate... perhaps a walk in a favourite place....

There are other moments... perhaps also filled with awe and love, but also full of pain and grief... the death of a loved one... terminal illness... crushing disappointment...

There are in between moments, when nothing seems to be happening.

Life is in a holding pattern... waiting for test results after a mammogram... hearing that a friend is lost in the mountains... no forward motion... just waiting... waiting... waiting...

And then there are our ordinary days... days that are filled with normal patterns and routines... days of satisfactions and pleasures as well as frustrations and irritations.

And, in the middle of that kind of mixture, which is the story of all our lives, we have the story of Jesus.

The minister who preached at my ordination service said that when he encountered people who didn't really know the Christian story, he told them that we had a Friday, Saturday, Sunday faith...

That in those three days, there was death and waiting and resurrection...

That we encountered life and death and life again...

And while I thought that this was a nicely compact way of explaining the experience of Jesus' death and resurrection, I wasn't quite satisfied with that... for it seems that in concentrating on those three days, he left out the three years of Jesus' public ministry.

We wouldn't have much in our New Testament scriptures if there was nothing about his life and teachings before his crucifixion.

His life led to his crucifixion...

His challenging of the authorities led to his crucifixion...

His life, which was of a devout Jewish man, ultimately led to his death on a cross.

His life, one in which he proclaimed that the greatest commandments were to love God with all our hearts, all our minds and all our souls and to love our neighbour as ourselves.

And so, on this Easter morning, we have this story of Jesus' resurrection.

Jesus... crucified as a criminal... put in a tomb... the stone shutting him in....

And the next morning something very amazing has happened... the stone has been rolled away... the tomb is empty... and Jesus lives...

Even if not immediately recognizable...

Imagine the shock and surprise of that morning...

Grief stricken from the events of the past few days, Mary went to the tomb and Jesus isn't there!

She runs to Simon Peter and the beloved disciple to tell them... at this point she did not know God had raised him from the dead... at this point, all she knows is that someone has taken his body away and she does not know where...

The disciples run... in fact, the author of the Gospel of John portrays them as racing each other...

And what do they do?

They go inside the tomb... and when they realize that it is indeed, empty, they leave and go back to their homes...

Are they disappointed?

Troubled?

Scared?

The text does not say...

Only Mary stays, faithful Mary Magdalene, a woman unfairly maligned by later church authorities, only she stays...

And blinded by tears and grief... she takes another look in the empty tomb... and finds two angels there... who say, "Why are you weeping?"

That phrase is echoed by Jesus as Mary mistakes him for the gardener....

Her tear-filled eyes do not recognize Jesus.

Until he calls her by name...

Isn't that the most wonderful feeling in the world... having someone you love calling your name....

And she recognizes him and then goes to tell the disciples, "I have seen the Lord."

And she is the first witness to the resurrection!

Imagine, in a male dominated world, Mary is the first witness!

Where do we see Jesus?

How do we say, "I have seen the Lord."

Each of us will have a story to tell...

I have seen the Lord in the shattered grief of a mother... Jesus cried with her...

I have seen the Lord in the joy of celebration... Jesus danced with me...

I have seen the Lord in small acts of kindness received... Jesus comforted me...

I have seen the Lord in demonstrations of justice... Jesus reminded me of a world where the hungry were fed, the naked were clothed and the sick and imprisoned visited...

I have seen the Lord in the food that is gathered here for the food bank...

I have seen the Lord in you and you and you and you...

Each of us has a story to tell...

Tell each other your stories of encounters with the risen Christ.

Tell your stories of faith to those who are aching to hear them.

Tell your stories of love and life and death and life again.

Jesus is everywhere, when we look for him.

We cannot hold on to him.... But we do not need to... he is within us...

Each and every one of us...

Yes, we have a Friday, Saturday, Sunday faith, but we have a Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday faith as well...

Which day are you living?

Ordinary time?

Death?

Waiting?

Resurrection?

Whichever it is... you can be assured that Jesus walks that road with you... he calls you by name... and he loves you...

Ordinary life and work and worship and crises and death and life again.

Times of trial, times of temptation... times of joy, times of celebration....

Easter Sunday is our reminder that death is not the end.

Thanks be to God, amen.

© Catherine MacDonald