

April 9, 2023, Easter

Matthew 28:1-10

^{28:1}After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. ²And 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. ³His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. ⁴For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. ⁵But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. ⁶He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. ⁷Then 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.” ⁸So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹Suddenly Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. ¹⁰Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my [friends] to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”

Last Sunday I said I was trying to get to an Easter faith I felt stuck in Holy Saturday, the Great Vigil of Easter, waiting to experience the resurrection

The horrors of daily life – hatred, violence, divisions – often make me want to stay in bed and cover my head with a blanket, they keep me from rolling back the stone of the faith tomb in seem stuck.

And then, this week, I read the Gospel lesson and saw something new: “He is going ahead of you ...”

This, for some “grace of God” reason, made me think about the difference between belief and faith.

There is a story of an artist on a wire high above the audience pushing a wheel barrel.

Belief is agreeing that the person can reach the other side without falling

Faith is putting yourself in the wheel barrel.

The women hear “he is going ahead of you”, in this case to Galilee. They are told to go and meet him there.

What if the word is not “go”, rather “follow”?

What if “he is going ahead of you” is not just to Galilee, but everywhere, all the time?

There is no place I have gone or will go that Jesus has not already been.

Violence? Destruction? War? – What has ever been worse than the Roman occupation of Israel?

Illness, both physical and mental? – Jesus was surrounded by it; inundated by it.

Death? – What is worse than the cross?

Jesus knows our fears, our pains, our sorrows, because he lived them. Still he walked on in faith.

“He is going before us.” We are called to follow.

Belief is trying to accept as true what the Gospel writers are saying; that Jesus arose from the dead

Faith is living this belief

Our faith in the bodily resurrection, is not based on believing what we are told, rather in choosing to “get in the wheel barrel” and follow.

What came to me this week is my stepping out in faith and following Jesus, who is going before me, has already led me, multiple times, to Easter.

Following Jesus means turning the other cheek, forgiving, healing, offering a kind word

As I have aged, something in me has changed. I try to smile more, to say thank you, especially to checkout clerks and people on the phone speaking for whatever corporation I am struggling with.

Following Jesus means to treat each person with respect, with genuine love, especially the person who at that moment is so irritating.

Following Jesus means to evaluate your day and ask yourself, “Did I share God’s love with the world today?”
“Would each person I encountered think that I valued them?”

I am trying to live into this way of living. Lord knows, I am most imperfect, but I try.

And, truth be told, it is in the most unexpected moments that I am overcome with a spirit of joy and contentment, even in the midst of sorrow, because God, working in and through me, has touched another, and this moment of God’s grace in my life raises me up.

These are Easter moments. These are times when the stone is rolled away from my despair about the state of the world and the light of God’s love comes pouring in. It is as if I am born anew; resurrected.

I am learning to live by faith; to put myself in the wheel barrel.

Friends, “[Jesus] is going before” us. As hard as it might be at times, I strongly encourage you to follow.

I assure you, you will be glad you did. Amen.