

“Walk with Us, Jesus”
Sermon by Oby Ballinger
Easter Sunday
Edina Morningside Community Church; April 21, 2019

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 worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”

Yesterday at this hour, I was in Acacia Park Cemetery on Pilot Knob Hill, overlooking Saint Paul. It was a gorgeous morning, but I wasn’t paying much attention to the weather. I was looking down at my feet, stepping carefully between grave markers. My purpose in going there was to assist a young couple in a very sad burial. We gathered above a small cavity in the ground, and prayed over the body of a person whose born-date and death-date were the same. There were a dozen people there, half of them children in bright spring clothes. What a paradox, to spend such a beautiful spring day in a cemetery. I looked out over acre upon acre of headstones, in addition to the centuries of Native people whose bodies have been returned to the earth on that hill. Tragedy and death are so real, beloveds, even in springtime.

“Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb,” we read. They picked their way among the rocks along the path. They knew the way well enough—where to turn left, where right. Which rocks were steady enough to step on, and which to avoid. Their hearts were filled with all that had been. Death was all too real, and they were filled with the enormity of what had happened. Had it only been three days since they had been with him? It felt like a whole lifetime. Barely a *week* had passed since the walk *into* Jerusalem. Dozens of people had lined the path as Jesus walked among them, then rode a small donkey as they cried “Hosanna! Save us!” Such messianic and revolutionary hopes, dashed. Salvation had *not* come with power and angel armies as they had hoped. Instead, the mirage had given way by Thursday to a meal with the disciples, one of whom would betray and all of whom would desert him. Jesus had walked among them there too, washing their feet, feeding them at the table, then going with them to the garden of Gethsemane. It was impossible to forget the images of arrest—deadly spears, clubs and a cut-off ear. Then Friday—terrible Friday. Jesus had walked with them every step of the way, until he could walk no further for the nails in his feet. It was on Friday when they carried him, walking his lifeless body to the tomb.

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary are thinking about all this when the earthquake strikes and knocks them from their feet. Such a great earthquake—to say nothing of the brilliant angel who follows! It is one of those moments where everything in a life can be measured according to it—before and after. As though the path they have been following is suddenly turned on its head. The ground shifts under them, and the facts of life and death which have flooded the hearts of these two disciples suddenly do not seem so inevitable. The inexorable arrows of death, leading from Sunday’s parade to Thursday’s arrest to Friday’s crucifixion, have now been turned back on themselves! The angel messenger proclaims, “He has been raised, as he said”! Death’s arrows have bounced off the tomb! They cannot win against this Christ, whose love is stronger than death. He is Emmanuel, God *with* us, beside us, walking with us all the way.

And by the rebounding of this undying love, Friday, Thursday and Sunday are reversed. The inexorable arrows of destiny—to Jerusalem, to Gethsemane, to Golgotha—are turned on their heads. Where they once pointed just to the tomb, and to the destiny of death for each one of us, now these point out of the tomb. Walk with us now, Jesus, *from* the tomb; *from* the cemetery, and into all the places where you would lead us, where your eternal life may be found.

You know how airplanes have those lights on the floor that illuminate in an emergency and point the way to go? Imagine today that as we leave the sanctuary, the arrows of inevitable, forboding death have been transformed by the resurrection into arrows pointing the way where Jesus will walk with us from the tomb. And where do they go, these arrows on the aisle that would point out into the light? Jesus will go from the tomb back to Galilee, he tells the disciples, and will find them there, back where they have come from, back in their customary, everyday lives. When you leave the church today, and return to what might be considered “ordinary life”, that’s the Galilee of everydayness where Christ will walk with us. So walk with us, Jesus into the rest of our lives. Walk with us to our homes and families, such as they are—broken and mended, fighting and blended. Walk with us to our places of work and leisure, transforming them from mindless activities into spaces to show holy love. Walk with us to our classrooms and doctor’s offices and job interviews, accompanying us in the hope of what’s possible, and in the times of defeat as well. Walk with us into our public life, into the bitterest headlines, healing the divides of “us” and “them” with a greater call to servanthood and humility. Walk with us, Jesus, from the tomb.

After the brief graveside service was done yesterday, my heart was more able to take in the beautiful view from Pilot Knob Hill. I wish I could say we felt or saw resurrection immediately, but it can be hard to see when death is so tragic and close. Nevertheless, as we climbed a hill back up to the parking lot on top, we felt the caress of sun and wind going with us. One member of the family reached out to offer an arm to another on the uneven ground. The parents stopped at the top and looked back, taking in the resting place of their beloved. Then they piled into cars, going to a picnic so the young children could play together. I don’t know for sure where they picnic was, but I think I heard one of them say, “Galilee”. Walk with us, Jesus, from the tomb.

Walk with us from the tomb to all the ordinary Galilees we go to next. Transform what seems commonplace with an earthquake of your undying love. Inspire us with your sacrificial courage, that we might seize chances to boldly love neighbors, strangers and enemies as you do. Mend what continues to need mending in our Galilee places. Deliver us from bondage to death, and transform the rocky roads we travel into paths where we see you face to face. Walk with us, Jesus, from the tomb and into all the rest of our lives. Christ is risen; Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!