

***The Messy Story of Resurrection***  
John 20:1-18

Years ago, we moved two blocks – into the home where we live now. This house was a “fixer-upper.” We decided to go ahead with some major remodeling on the first floor – including the kitchen – immediately after we moved in. We wanted to pack and unpack only once. It was summer, so we arranged to be away for three weeks. The bulk of the work would be done in our absence. We would return home, move in to a newly remodeled kitchen, and get back into our routines in the fall.

It didn't work out that way. While we were away, I was getting call and faxes from our contractor. One complication led to another, and to another, and on it went. And so instead of returning home and moving into a new kitchen and getting back into our fall routines, I found myself cooking in our upstairs bathroom with a microwave and a hot plate, serving meals on a card table in our son's bedroom, washing dishes in the bathtub, making more trips to Home Depot than I care to think about, and feeling scattered and strained by the chaos. But eventually it did get finished. By Thanksgiving we hosted a wonderful, memorable family gathering. The remodeling was a long drawn out mess, but once it was finally done, we could say the hassle and the mess were worth it.

Change is messy. Take this week at St. John's for example. Months ago, your vestry had to make the difficult decision to eliminate the fulltime parish administrator position with benefits and return instead to a part time parish office manager position, which was the norm for years around here. This was about fiscal responsibility. Of course there are people involved in this kind of transition, which makes this heart-wrenching and awkward. And to our great delight, a candidate was hired and was able to begin this past week, and could not only overlap with Phyllis, the outgoing administrator, but even attend the vestry meeting Tuesday night. Well, lo and behold, Wednesday morning the new office manager sent an email with her resignation – after working a half of a day. It was due to a family emergency. Thankfully, Jacob Carroll, our music scholar, is available and able to step in on a temporary basis. He started Friday. Meanwhile, Phyllis's graciousness through this process has been a gift and a witness to her faith. The search continues.

Change is messy. Even in our Gospel reading this Easter morning, we see that *resurrection* is messy too. Even when *God* is making the change, even when *God* is doing a new thing, there's a mess. If you attended an Easter Vigil last night, you may have noticed such a thread in all of those vigil readings. Creation begins out of chaos. Re-creation comes out of the destruction of the flood. Freedom for the Israelites comes out of a mass exodus from Egypt that involves death, destruction, and chaos. And today, in our Gospel this morning, chaos is the order of the day. Things don't happen on time, in the right order – or in what we may *think* the right order should be. Everyone doesn't respond in the same way at the same time.

Let me stop here for a minute and you can demonstrate with me: Alleluia! Christ is risen! **The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!** Thank you. It wasn't like this on the first Easter. There were no bulletins. There was no Gospel to read. No, on the first Easter, everyone doesn't have the same understanding of, or the same perception of, the same event. This story of Easter we encounter today, even though it is the cornerstone of our Christian faith, is not a neat and tidy spring time tale. It's a story of grief, of confusion, of fear, of misunderstanding, of jumping to conclusions, of making false assumptions, of competition, withdrawal, abandonment, misidentification, tears, and eventually, trust. Eventually belief. But it's a messy story. And we learn from it that resurrection, not unlike remodeling, or getting a new office manager, is a messy process too.

This messy resurrection story starts out in the dark. Mary visits the tomb not just in the darkness of early morning, but in the darkness of her pain and her grief and her fear. She sees the stone rolled away and immediately makes a false assumption. She runs to tell two disciples that Jesus' body has been stolen. (The first fake news!) Then Peter

and the other disciples race, literally, one outrunning the other, to see who gets to the tomb first. One gets there first, the other goes into the tomb and believes first

Then what do they do? They go home! Can you imagine? Can you imagine the conversation between the two of them? One, somehow, believing, after having seen only the empty tomb. The other, probably still assuming, with Mary Magdalene, that someone has stolen Jesus' body. It must have been quite a discussion, if not an argument. Still, they both simply withdraw and go back home. For Mary, it's insult added to injury: not only is Jesus killed, but now his dead body is stolen. And on top of that she is abandoned by her closest friends to weep alone at the opened, vacant tomb.

But Mary stays. Mary stays and weeps. Mary stays and weeps just long enough. Just long enough to be greeted by angels. Just long enough to be greeted by someone she confuses and misidentifies as the gardener. Just long enough to recognize, eventually, the risen Lord standing in her midst. Just long enough to be so convinced of his presence that she could go from there and announce confidently to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord!"

What does all this tell us about Easter? What does all this tell us about how God works? What does all this tell us about the Christian life?

My prayer is that you, individually and collectively, will come to see that there is a place for YOU in this messy story of resurrection. How do YOU come to Easter today? Do you come like Mary Magdalene, in the darkness of pain and grief and fear? Do you come making false assumptions? Do you come like the two disciples, racing against someone? Does belief come easily for you or are you more skeptical? Do you plan to withdraw when you leave here today? Do you feel abandoned? Do you feel like weeping? Are you willing to stay, when you feel abandoned, just long enough?

There's a place in this messy resurrection story for you. And there's a place in this messy resurrection story for us as we live together in community as well – in the communities of our families and workplaces, and in this community of discernment called St. John's. Because, in the midst of confusion, or grief, or fear, or misunderstanding, when we jump to conclusions, make false assumptions, compete, withdraw, feel abandoned, when things don't seem to be working out the way we think they should be working out, when people perceive the same situation differently, when people don't respond in the same way at the same time; when things might seem to be a mess in our lives, take heed. This messy story of resurrection has something important to say. It just maybe that God is doing some remodeling. And when we stay with it just long enough, like Mary Magdalene, we may be greeted by angels. And, like Mary Magdalene, when we least expect it, we just may recognize the risen Lord. And we will be able to say the hassle and the mess were worth it. And we will shout with reckless abandon, "Alleluia! Christ is risen! **The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!**"

*Pastor Dana Runestad*

1 April 2018 ~ Easter Sunday

St. John's Episcopal Church ~ Plymouth MI