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Matthew 28:1-10
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Afraid, yet filled with joy

This week started with a call from my mother about how I was going to make Easter special. And I asked her, "how do I make Easter special?" We cannot all get up to the front of the sanctuary and sing the Hallelujah Chorus from Handel's Messiah. We cannot greet each other with "he has risen" "he has risen indeed" and then embrace each other with blurry-eyed exuberance. We cannot sing and dance around the whole sanctuary like the women at the tomb, eager to tell the good news to all. Those things are still buried in the tomb. And they will be buried for a long time.

But, not all is lost. We were able to listen to our choir from all those years ago. And the Ortman/Boldt quartet will be singing later on in the service. Our music can be resurrected. We may not be able to hug each other, but we can certainly greet each other during our passing of the peace. Our community is resurrected in little ways, in calls, in dropped off meals. And no, we cannot dance around the sanctuary, but we can share our joy with one another. Our joy can be resurrected.

Holy Week is bittersweet. Huh? So I invite you to join me in a bittersweet journey, from the heartbreaking journey to the tomb. To the cruelty of Pilate. And then finally to the joy of the resurrection.

Please Pray with me: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be pleasing to you. Our rock and our Redeemer. Amen

If you'll forgive me. Let us walk together to the tomb. Let us take the same journey of Mary Madeline and Mary the mother of Jesus. Let us go to the tomb to grieve what we have lost.

And it hurts right now. It hurts to look at death. While I preach, I'm going to show a powerful photo depicting Christ's death to COVID. When looking at the enormity of it all is too much, meditate upon a singular death, the death of Jesus Christ.

Right now some of us are under severe stress. Some of us are looking at the news. Some of us have seen terrible things. Mass graves in New York. urns filled with the remains of unknown people in China. The streets filled with abandoned bodies in Ecuador. People denied treatment in Italy. We are reminded that 100,000 deaths are a wave of suffering that cannot be comprehended. Stalin once said, "A single death is a tragedy, a million deaths is a statistic. We cannot imagine the suffering that is happening around the world because of COVID, let alone the countless others who die daily from less sensational diseases. And I do not think we can... I do not think

we can imagine it. Not because we are heartless, but because we care too much. We just care too much. (whisper.) we care too much.

And right now some of us are overwhelmed. Some of us are tired even though we got a full night of sleep. Some of us are just watching the days go by. Some of us are looking at April 30th as some magical date when everything will go back to normal, and they can just put their lives on pause till then. Maybe we are feeling guilty because we are not being super productive like Facebook is saying we should be. I don't know who needs to hear this, To those of us paralyzed, I urge you to forgive yourself. I forgive you for not being productive, your congregation forgives you, and Christ forgives you. Your anxiety is normal and expected in times such as these.

We are going through a trauma.

Imagine the trauma of Mary Madeline and Mary mother of Jesus. They are walking to Jesus's unmarked grave. They are traveling to claim his body, to give it a proper burial. I imagine they are walking with tears in their eyes. With shuffling feet of people who do not want to go somewhere, but know that they need to. Mary and Mary already had to watch their brother and son die in front of their eyes. They already had to travel with a disciple to bury Jesus. What was left to do, but to cry

and wail? Jesus's death is not something that the Marys can fix. But its also not something they can ignore.

But let us not forget why Jesus is in that tomb. Let us not forget that Jesus was put to death by Pilate. I believe that Pilate chose to kill Jesus so he could keep his job. Pilate even posted guards at the tomb in an attempt to stop the resurrection. Pilate was no stranger to violence. When Pilate posted images of Caesar as a deity in the city of Jerusalem, a crowd of Jews surrounded Pilate's house and so he ordered his soldiers to draw their swords to slaughter the crowd. Later Pilate stole from temple treasury and again a crowd formed to protest and so he ordered his soldiers to kill again. In our communion liturgy, I tell you one explanation about why Pilate killed Jesus. That Pilate killed Jesus for offering life and liberation. He killed Jesus to silence Jesus's followers, to erase his name from their lips. To demonstrate his power by killing this would be revolutionary.

Where do we see people willing to kill, either directly or indirectly so that they can keep hold of power? Where do we see people sacrificed for the sake of the economy or the stock market? Where do we see some bodies being considered more important to protect or cure than others? Those who can pay, those with the right skin color, those from states with the right kind of politics.

Can you see the crucifixion happening today? Can you see the tomb? Can you cry and wail along with Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus because the life of a poor homeless Jew from the countryside matters. Jesus's life mattered, but they still took it away.

But let us return to the Marys when they witness a violent earthquake and a bolt of lightning as an angel of the Lord comes down. Whatever you make of angels, these verses tell the story of a sudden and unexpected miracle of God breaking into history. The angel is an interruption in the plans of Pilot. The angel interrupts the grief that the Marys were expecting to have to go through. The angel interrupts the story that everyone was expecting.

And so too does this angel interrupt us in the places that we are at. The angel interrupts our grief, our numbness, and our denial. The angel has something to say in our lives. Does the angel fix anything? NO, the angel does not rewrite the past, the angel does not fix the future, the angel is just a messenger. The angel just says what is happening.

The Angel proclaims that yes, Jesus was crucified, but Jesus is. Not. here.

Christ has risen!!!!

Christ has risen indeed.

The stone is rolled aside and the tomb is empty!

And you've got to tell everyone the good news. You've got to shout it to the heavens. You've got to tell all those people who have fallen asleep or ran away. You've got to tell all those people who are waiting for everything to return to normal that NORMAL IS NOW! And this new normal can be better than anything that came before it.

The German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer said, "Every parting gives a foretaste of death, every reunion a hint of the resurrection." And so let our meeting today and every other meeting we have to be a hint of the resurrection. In the response I'm going to ask you where you've seen hints of the resurrection, and here is my answer.

I see the resurrection in the eagerness of people in this church to help each other. I see pie and meals being delivered to doorsteps. I see masks being made so we can protect each other. I see strict adherence to physical distancing. I see people showing up for worship. I see people showing up for each other. I see young adults

still playing online games together. I see the youth still meeting for the online youth group. I see an overflowing generosity of people who want to help, but do not know how to help. So we just try in our little clumsy ways to love each other.

Indeed when the Marys leave the graveyard they meet the risen Lord, kneel down and embrace his pierced, but not broken feet. Jesus remains their brother, their son. He is risen, yes, but he is still human, is still divine. And no amount of divinity is going to close the wounds on his feet and hands. Jesus does not fix all of their problems. They are still despised by the powers of this world and afraid for their lives. Many of the disciples are going to die on crosses themselves. BUT! That is not the end of the story. The end of the story is that Jesus's love that he showed his disciples and his betrayer is still alive! "LOVE ONE ANOTHER AS I HAVE LOVED YOU" And Jesus's love for his killers is still alive, "FATHER FORGIVE THEM, THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO"

The tomb is empty!!!! The tomb is empty and so is the sanctuary building! And so we will become church to one another. We will become the sanctuary to one another. Hallelujah, hallelujah in the highest heaven.

Yes, we are afraid. But we are ALSO filled with joy.