

April 16, 2017

“The Third Day”
John 20:1-18

Good morning! Jesus is risen! (Jesus is risen, indeed!)

What a week it has been...starting with Palm Sunday last Sunday! We experienced Holy Thursday together in “The Upper Room” in the Fellowship Hall, and Good Friday, when we accompanied Jesus to Calvary, here in this place.

The day after Good Friday is the second day. The Day after we received bad news. It’s the day when our hopes and dreams are shattered by the tragedies that have happened to us. The day when we grieve for the worst diagnosis we have heard about ourselves or our loved ones. The day when our hearts are broken because someone we had loved died. The day when we are distressed about our own future because our job, house or whatever is important to us was suddenly taken away. It’s the day when we ask ourselves, “Did it really happen?” “Am I having a bad dream?” We say to ourselves, “I wish I was having just a nightmare,” but we know it to the bone that it is not a nightmare. It is the reality we are facing.

I think all of us have experienced our second day in our lives, didn’t we? It’s the day when our faith in a God of goodness and love was shaken, if not completely shattered.

On the second day, the day after the crucifixion of Jesus, the disciples of Jesus hid themselves in utter despair and loss.

On **the third day**, a disciple of Jesus called Mary Magdalene, while it was **still dark**, went to the tomb where Jesus had been laid, probably with a couple of other women. The Gospel of John says that it was in a garden, near where Jesus died on the cross. The women found that the stone had been rolled away from the tomb and the body of Jesus was nowhere to be found.

Being notified by Mary, Peter and another disciple, who is said to be John, ran to the tomb. They went inside the tomb, saw the linen cloths used to wrap Jesus’ body lying there; and they left, being even more confused and lost.

Mary stayed outside at the tomb, crying. It was too painful for Mary to bear that Jesus’ body was gone. She must have feared of another desecration and another humiliation to her Lord. Crying, she bent down to look into the tomb... and saw two angels dressed in white, seated where the body of Jesus had been, one at the head and one at the foot. The angels asked her, “Woman, why are you crying?”

She replied; “They (probably she meant those who hated Jesus) have taken away my Lord.”

Then Mary turned and saw Jesus standing there. The Gospel of John says, “but she didn’t know it was Jesus.” For many years I couldn’t understand those words. How could not Mary recognize Jesus? She saw him with her eyes.

Some say that Mary’s vision was blurred because of her tears or because of the morning light. Some even say that Mary was probably near sighted, or it was still dark.

Now I believe that Mary couldn’t recognize Jesus because of her grief. The grief stricken person cannot imagine any good news, can’t envision it. They are in utter despair that any sign of hope or anything contrary to what they are experiencing is unthinkable.

We know the expression, “selective hearing,” don’t we? I don’t mean the intentional selective hearing, such as somebody says something to me and I intentionally ignore it because I don’t want to hear it or don’t want to do what the person is asking me to do. Selective hearing is we only hear what we are focusing on or what we are expecting to hear. An example is that in a middle of a city we try to focus on what a tour guide is saying to us and ignore any other noise such as other people talking, cars or music.

The same can be said about selective seeing. We do selective seeing when we drive, don’t we? Even though many objects come into our eyes, we focus on and look for only what’s important in driving: road signs, traffic lights, occasionally police cars.

I think Mary was doing her selective seeing. Because she was so focused on the death of Jesus in her deep sorrow, she couldn’t even imagine or dream of seeing Jesus alive. It was totally unimaginable. Impossible. Unbelievable.

Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you crying? Who are you looking for?” Mary thought that he was a gardener. Holding off any offense she may have felt towards someone who might have removed her Lord’s body and putting herself together as much as she could, she said, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him and I will get him.”

“Mary,” said Jesus. When she heard Jesus call her by name, Mary recognized him and said, “Rabbouni,” teacher in Aramaic, the language they spoke. Instantly, she was transformed from a brokenhearted disciple to the grateful believer in the resurrection.

Jesus told her not to hold onto him, for he would ascend to God the Father, but told her to go to (he said) “my brothers and sisters with the message of this good news.

So Mary did. She went to his disciples and said, “I’ve seen the Lord.”

Are we sometimes like Mary? Stuck in the second day, focused on death. Even though there are signs of life and resurrection, we cannot see. Or we have such an idea of how the third day should

come, in what form or shape or when, we cannot see the hope and resurrection God is offering to us.

Mary recognized Jesus when he called her by name. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, who laid his life for his sheep and knows and calls every one of them by name, calls us and sends us out to proclaim the good news of his resurrection to those who are frightened and have lost hope, to those who are in despair and are brokenhearted.

Some of us may doubt that Jesus was resurrected. Even if we may not be able to prove scientifically the resurrection of Jesus, we see its evidence.

I mentioned before that totally heartbroken, despairing and grieving people, who are stuck on their second day, cannot imagine or, let alone, create any happy ending to their suffering. The disciples of Jesus, however, were radically transformed, empowered, emboldened, and filled with hope as a result of their encounter with **the resurrected Christ**. And they followed him all the way this time even at the cost of their lives. Thanks to them, we celebrate Easter today because of their witnesses to the risen Christ.

In *40 Days of Reflection*, which goes with his book, *24 Hours That Changed the World*, Adam Hamilton says that the Gospel of John is alluding to the garden where Jesus was buried and risen to the Garden of Eden, where Adam and Eve disobeyed God and Paradise was lost. He says that John wants us to understand that what happened at Eden was reversed at Calvary and in the garden.

Mary mistook Jesus as a gardener. Then, let us say that Jesus, the “Gardener,” wants us to continue the work he started - to restore the garden by healing brokenness and by spreading the Good News of his victory over death and all the evil forces. For on the cross and at the Resurrection, he defeated them all.

This risen Christ commissions us to restore the garden we live in by pulling out the weeds of injustice, hate, poverty, and self-centeredness and sowing seeds of compassion, mercy and love. One of the most loved Easter hymns, which we sang this morning, was written by John Wesley, the founder of Methodism. “Jesus Christ is risen today, “ -not “has risen” or “rose.” This is powerful because it places us in community with those who witnessed the resurrection in their own lifetimes and reaffirms our own hope of being set free from death. “Made like him, like him we rise” - also stated in the present tense - conveys a hope that brings God’s power and new life now lifting us from our current situation of “death” and into everlasting life.

Do we choose life over death? Will you respond to Jesus, when he calls your name? The risen Christ is counting on us, community of believers, as the carrier of the Easter message. Amen.