

“That Special Morning”

Psalm 16: 5-11; Matthew 28: 1-10

Some of you probably know that I just love stories. I look for them in books, on TV, in movies, every way I can get my hands on them. I am also a sucker for a happy ending.

That is usually the way a fairy tale, for example, ends: “And they lived happily ever after.” All the loose ends are tied up, the villains and bad guys get theirs, and the good people and the good fairies and all ‘live happily ever after.”

Today’s Scripture, from the Gospel of Matthew is a wonderful happy ending. But it is not a fairy tale that is ending. It is not a joke that is ending.

Oh, no, it is the story that continues on from Jesus’ crucifixion and burial.

That was what had happened three days before. Jesus had been nailed to a cross, and he had died. Two of his friends, Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea had provided him a proper burial, (in the tomb lent by Joseph of Arimathea.) The body had been wrapped in a linen cloth, the tomb had been sealed with a stone, rolled in front of it. The governor, Pontius Pilate, had ordered soldiers to guard the tomb.

So, it was thought that that was that, the end, no more. No happy ending at all. As Ernest Hemingway once said, “Every true story ends in death.”

With all due respect to Mr. Hemingway, he was mistaken about this true story. This true story had not ended in death. This true story had not ended at all.

No, Jesus’ story continued, starting with chapter 28, in Matthew’s Gospel.

Mary Magdalene and “the other Mary” (I’m just going to call her Mary 2), came to the tomb, that morning. It was after the Sabbath, and day was dawning.

They had come, as so many of us do, to be with their recently dead loved one, in this way. They would be near his tomb, and therefore near the body of Jesus. Mary Magdalene and Mary 2 did not expect to go into the tomb. They knew that there was a large stone in the way. But they could be there, at least. That was what they expected.

Something else happened, though. To begin with, there was a “great earthquake.”

Generally, we think of earthquakes as experiences we would rather not have. They are scary, dangerous, life-threatening bad events.

This time was different, though. It was a good earthquake; during it, an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, rolled the stone away from the tomb's opening and sat down on the stone.

That alone sounds exciting and good! It was the beginning of God's Easter message: death does not win! Think of God saying, "No tomb can keep my Son in it!"

This angel was like so many other angels which are described in the Bible. "His appearance was like lightning and his clothing was white as snow." This angel scared the posted guards to pieces; they froze.

This angel also started out with the words which angels usually say. "Do not be afraid," the angel said to Mary Magdalene and Mary 2.

His whole speech [using the Message version of the Bible] was: "There is nothing to fear here. I know you're looking for Jesus, the One they nailed to the cross. He is not here. He was raised just as he said. Come, and look at the place where he was placed.

Now, get on your way quickly and tell his disciples. He is risen from the dead. He is going on ahead of you to Galilee. You will see him there. That's the message."

Mary Magdalene and Mary 2 obeyed instantly. What a joyful, happy message to deliver to Jesus' disciples! Actually, it says "they left the tomb quickly and with fear and great joy."

So, yes, there was some fear mixed in, and I am sure we would have felt the same, in the same circumstances.

The women were ready and willing to carry out their task, and deliver this message, when something else happened, something even better than seeing the empty tomb and the angel.

Jesus, himself, risen from the dead, suddenly met them. "Then Jesus met them, stopping them in their tracks. "Good morning," he said." [Message]

Good morning? Good morning? Best, most wonderful and joyful morning of all time!

The women “fell to their knees, embraced his feet, and worshiped him.”

{Message}

Oh, yes. This was their Master, their beloved Teacher, alive again! If they had ever wondered or doubted, now they knew. Jesus, their dearest friend, was God’s own Son.

“Jesus said, “You’re holding onto me for dear life! Don’t be frightened like that. Go tell my brothers that they are to go to Galilee, and that I’ll meet them there.”

[Message]

So, Jesus’ story, his true-life story, did not end in death. It ended in life.

Funny thing about this ending, though. It was really a beginning.

It was the beginning of the Christian faith—what we believe, that Jesus is God’s Son, Jesus was resurrected from the dead.

That resurrection was and is a victory! It overpowered death! It overpowered sin!

Jesus’ whole life, beginning with his birth in Bethlehem, and continuing through his ministry in Israel, and through his crucifixion, death, burial, resurrection, and on to his ascent to heaven forty days later, has been and is a gift to all of us. It offers us wisdom and righteousness and mercy and truth. It offers us forgiveness of our sins, salvation of our souls, and life everlasting, here and beyond our graves.

Forget the happy ending business; it’s more like a happy, joyful never-ending story. Amen.

Given by Reverend Sally J. DeMasters, April 12, 2020.