

“Daybreak”
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Overbrook Presbyterian Church
Easter Sunday!
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Scripture Reading: Matthew 28:1-10

¹After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. ²And 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. ³His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. ⁴For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. ⁵But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. ⁶He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. ⁷Then 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.” ⁸So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹Suddenly Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. ¹⁰Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”



Sermon: Daybreak

The disciples were Jesus’ friends. Peter, James, John, Bartholomew, all of ‘em. They hadn’t started out that way, of course. In the beginning they were just regular folks who accepted an invitation, a job offer really. But in their time with Jesus they had learned so much and born witness to so much more. They had seen incredible acts of healing, yes, and miracles that boggled the mind, but also, and maybe most importantly, they had seen Jesus make better the lives of marginalized and hurting people. And in the process, they had grown close to him and become not just his followers, but his friends.

It would be hard not to when you really think about it. Endless days of learning and travel and work and holding back the crowds who wanted to see and touch him would have been followed by quieter moments. As evening fell, they would sit around the fire, processing the day, asking Jesus questions about the people they’d met and the things he said and did. And in those moments when it was just them, they would have shared food and wine and laughter; stories of their lives, memories of childhood, worries for the future, and the occasional bit of flatulence humor, you know, the kinds of things that help mold groups of strangers into families:

For all his compassion and wisdom, Jesus was also engaging and approachable, like Tom Hanks in most of his movies. And for all their reputation as a band of evangelists and founders of the modern church, the disciples were also companions, paisans, friends, like Han Solo and Chewbacca in all of their movies.

So when this all turned south; when Jesus was arrested, betrayed by one of their own, it was more than just a blow to their messianic hopes for the coming Kingdom of God (although it was that, too), it was a knife to the heart. The darkness that fell on Good Friday wasn’t just the coming of night. For the disciples it was a heavy, stunned sadness; the kind that leaves your soul numb and makes your chest feel so tight you can hardly breathe.

Matthew tells us that when Jesus was arrested, the disciples fled. All except Peter, who stuck around. But even his courage failed him, repeatedly. What must those long hours over Thursday night and into Friday have been like? As they waited for word, helpless, unable to change the course of events. And when word did come that next day of Jesus’ crucifixion, of the way justice had been perverted, of his suffering and death among criminals, what must they have felt?

Losing a loved one is hard. Despair, emptiness, regret. Questions of “What could I have done differently? What things did I leave unsaid?” Plus, losing someone so young, and in a manner so unfair, made it even more tragic. Death reminds us of our own mortality. How much more so for these young men and women who accompanied Jesus on this discipleship journey?

And so, scattered and afraid and heartbroken, the disciples found themselves consumed by the darkness that fell across the land on Good Friday.

But then Sunday morning dawned. And the women came running back from the tomb with an utterly astounding story: Christ is risen! And as that news began to spread among the disciples, and with it, the realization of the truth of God's might and the depth of God's mercy, the darkness began to dissipate.

No, not "dissipate." "Dissipate" isn't the right word for what happened. The darkness didn't just go away. It was *overcome*. Overcome like the morning sun climbing steadily in the sky overcomes the light of every other star and ultimately vanquishes the night.

It wasn't the realization that a mistake had been made; that somehow Jesus had survived, or that a confederate had swooped in at the last minute to save him from death. No, Jesus had really suffered, and he had really died. This was something else. This was *resurrection*; the power of God overcoming the sin of humanity. And for the disciples, that realization on Easter morning overpowered and defeated the darkness of Good Friday.

One of my favorite authors is an English pastor named Leslie Weatherhead who served in London during the first half of the 20th Century. As a survivor of two world wars, he knew a little bit about darkness. Yet he was convinced that darkness is not the way of the world. It's an aberration. He called Christianity "the religion of the dawn" Not because there is no darkness, but because darkness will always be overcome by light. He writes:

*"[Christianity] is a religion of unquenchable faith and hope and patience; unquenchable because it believes that the permanent thing is light, and the passing thing is darkness; that however long the night, whether it be in world affairs or the poignant private world of the human heart, the night will pass. 'You [simply] can't hold back the dawn.'"*¹

And there, at its most basic, is the good news of Easter morning. That no matter how dark and desperate the night, the dawn will come. The waiting may be excruciating, the darkness thick. But the dawn, is inevitable.

Now, there are many truths to be learned and remembered on this Easter morning. When Jesus emerges from the tomb, we are reminded that the power of God's love is greater than the things we fear most in this world, even death. And when the machinations of the Pharisees and the phony justice of a Roman court fail to silence Christ, we learn that God's power and desire for good are more potent than our own human capacity for evil.

But as important as all of that is, the truth that no matter how bad things seem - and they can seem dreadful at times- God's Kingdom will come, God's will *will* be done. The permanent thing is light, you see. The passing thing is darkness.

Think about it this way: our sun fills the solar system with light. Literally the only reason we experience night is because the earth turns and puts us in shadow for a few hours every day. But our world is bathed in sunlight. The permanent thing is light. The passing thing is darkness.

That good news is especially important in this age of coronavirus, as we exist day-to-day within an environment of death and fear, our lives literally *transformed* by the imperative to keep one another safe. But it's also important in every other part of our lives where the future seems uncertain and our worries and worst fears feel overwhelming.

God never promises us that we won't face struggles and difficulties. But God does promise that we won't have to face them alone. Unfortunately, pain and struggle in some form will always be a part of every life. Just like night is a part of every day. But we are reminded that worries, and fears, and struggles, are temporary. Life and light, joy and peace, these are eternal. God is more powerful than the worst that we face, so we trust in God to help us overcome. It may not happen as soon as we'd like, but we know that on the other side of darkness, light awaits. In the words of the Psalmist: "Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning."²

Friends, dawn has broken across the eastern sky and we have gone to the tomb and we have found it empty. Christ is Risen! He is risen indeed! May that light of Easter guide us, and fill us and shine within us, always.

To God be all glory, honor, power, and dominion, in this world and in the world that is to come. Amen.

End Notes

¹ Weatherhead, Leslie D. *Key Next Door and Other London City Temple Sermons*. Abingdon Press, 1960, pg. 170

² Psalm 30:5b, NRSV