

Easter Sunday
April 20, 2014
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Yesterday, I crossed through Copley Square, bustling with people and last minute preparations for tomorrow's Boston Marathon, and I paused to reflect on the blue and yellow banners flying high above Boylston Street. I had a friend running a 5K, and I kept seeing runners from that race and hoping I'd run into her. But as I scanned the crowd for her face, I found myself transported to the events of last April. One year ago, we saw terror writ large on the streets of our city. One year ago we watched wild eyed and waited for our loved ones to tell us they were okay. One year ago we welcomed the President to our fair city, to speak peace to us, to assure us that we would be okay. Then we spent the following day sheltering in place, what was left of our sense of security shattered.

There are moments, big and small, that require us to find ways to move through the world, to make meaning, to find more resilience and capacity in ourselves than we thought possible. The events of last year's marathon and manhunt were some "big" moments, but we have each experienced, and by extension the whole community has experienced, moments of transformation this year. We have experienced birth and death, separation and reconciliation, and all the spaces in between. We have learned so much about

ourselves, and we have grown as individuals, as a church, as a city, in ways we don't even know yet.

Last year, the Sunday after the marathon, Laura Ruth preached about how we make meaning in the wake of transformative events, especially in the wake of disaster. We have to figure out what it means, for each of us, that something life-changing has happened. We look around to see how close or how far we are from danger, how close we are to safety. Was I injured? Could I have been? Could it have been *my* loved ones rather than strangers whose lives we collectively mourned? Last year I lived in Watertown, and my understandings of danger and safety have forever changed. Let me tell you that I learned that armed guards coming to your door don't necessarily make you feel safer.

These women, the Marys, came to the tomb, expecting such armed guards, expecting something that aligned with the violence they had witnessed mere days before. In the darkness just before dawn, they came to tend Jesus' body, to make meaning, to understand themselves and their place in the tragedy. They were doing what we have done; visiting the site where the events took place, telling their stories, figuring out how to put one foot in front of another...maybe just because they needed to know that it really

happened, that the man they knew and loved had really died in a violent public spectacle. What they found, then, was no doubt a re-traumatizing experience: an earthquake, the stone removed, even the soldiers stricken by fear, and an angel with a face like lightning piercing the darkness. I imagine they felt the way many of us have felt when we've heard helicopters too close overhead.

This year has been a marathon, not a sprint, toward a new normal in our city. This Lent has been a marathon, not a sprint, in our congregation as we have done the slow work of forgiveness, seeking to understand ourselves as resilient, forgiven and forgiving. Life is a marathon, not a sprint. During Lent, during the past year, we have come to understand, I pray, that we are still alive, so alive...and that we are still running our races, bills and family dinners, illness and healing, bedtimes and vacations, recovery and relapse, relationships broken and relationships mended, violence in our city streets and in our homes and the call to end such warring madness. Where is the Good News? How far to the Finish Line?

It doesn't escape me that these women in our Scripture were there at the tomb together. The things they had seen and heard in the past week, they had experienced together; they had witnessed and reflected to one another the truth of all they had shared. They never expected to be worshiping at the feet of the risen Christ together, but because they were not alone, they could

reflect that all these things were real, there could be no denying that it had happened. No doubt in the days and weeks that followed, they had to check in with each other again—“That really happened, right? The stone rolled away, right? The angel said not to be afraid, right? The Rabbi came and spoke to us, right? I’m not crazy, right????” And so it is with us, be it checking in about forgiveness, calling a sponsor, talking to a spiritual director, coming to church. We need to know that we are not alone, that we are okay, that we are really experiencing what we think we are in this wild marathon of faith, that we are not completely out there and alone walking these spiritual paths, sharing in stories that defy logic and reason.

There’s a proverb that says, “If you want to walk fast, walk alone; if you want to walk far, walk together.” No one ever talks about the Bad News of Easter, but here it is. The bad news about Easter is that it doesn’t erase our suffering; we are still the same imperfect people on Easter Sunday that we were on Good Friday. But the good news about Easter is that sometimes life offers us moments of redemption when we see ourselves in our glory, when we see what’s possible, when we see the fruits of our spiritual journey reflected back to us. This Good News of Easter is best experienced, in my humble opinion, in community—just like the Marys at the tomb. We are forgiving and forgiven, loving and beloved, broken but glorious, and these identities bring us closer not to ground zero of the hurts of our pasts but

rather closer to the heart of God, closer to the holiness of our own heartbeats. We are brought closer to each other, to the breath that connects us to the spirit of life. We get to name all the ways our lives are broken, all the ways we experience redemption, all the ways we find Christ along the journey, and we get to reflect back to one another how sane and resilient we are—we get to be the Marys, the ones to tell each other that yes, horrible things happen and yes, we are each of us a miracle and yes, the light of Christ is alive in your eyes. And yours, and yours and yours. We walk the valleys of our lives together like the women, with trepidation and disbelief. And we find along the way what the women found: wonder and brilliance, new life, and an urgency to share the Good News.

Go quickly and tell the others, Jesus says to these women bearing witness. Go quickly. Well, isn't that a funny way to end a season in which we have been doing the slow work of forgiveness? Still, I get that impulse. After weeks of doing this slow work, or not doing this slow work, or doing the slow work of preparing to do the slow work, it feels like we should be able to rush to put some cap on our Lenten journey. The truth is, though, that the slow work of forgiveness is never quite done. We do the work slowly, together, because we are an Easter people who believe that light and love have the final word, and that being a forgiven and forgiving people is how we shift our gaze from separation to reconciliation, from sins done to us or sins we have done

to making space for God's love and light to fill the broken places in us and between us. To know that God is doing for us what we cannot do for ourselves. So go quickly to share the Good News that darkness and death cannot separate us from the love of God in Christ, but remember, life is a marathon, not a sprint, so please, let's not go so quickly that we miss the glory of reflecting God's love in our midst. Amen? Amen.