

In the midst of Holy Week preparations, Joe and I did what many of our colleagues were also doing – try to come up with creative ideas to enhance the celebratory nature that is Easter. I think we did a pretty good job of it with those balloons – with thanks to Melanie who helped us out with them!

Between the flowers, the balloons, the phenomenal music, and the presence of all who have gathered, I think it's safe to say that Parkminster has got its Easter celebrations down. But when you think about it, the first Easter morning was far from celebratory. In fact, it was quiet—and dark. In the Gospel account that we read this morning, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb very early and saw that the stone had been moved and the tomb was empty. But she did not sing, "Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Give Thanks!" Instead, she went and told the disciples that the tomb was empty. After they confirmed that Jesus was – in fact – not in the tomb they returned to their homes and Mary stood outside of the tomb and cried.

Not exactly that happiest, most cheerful, balloons-flying-through-the-air kind of way to start off the very first Easter morning.

It is indeed a bit of a conundrum. How does one convey the great joy of this day? What new words of hope can be found? What new understanding refreshes our hearts? How does this Easter story relate to us?

A friend of mine asked me that question in a Facebook message this week. Only recently has she found herself slowly moving back towards the church – with great caution – in her words. She has a spiritual hunger, she told me, but she doesn't want any saccharine-messages that will do nothing but make her teeth ache. She wants a meaning from the Easter message that stands up to the pain and heartache that the world faces on a daily basis. She wants to make sense of this story of the empty tomb. So do I.

But last Sunday as we celebrated Palm Sunday, shouted Hosanna, waved our palms, and the children opened boxes containing symbols of Holy week, we promised you that something exciting was going to happen if you came back this week. And indeed, it has.

This is a story we have to tell. And in such a time as this, the story of the resurrection begs for attention, yet it defies any easy comfort. And that is what makes this story from scripture both immobilizing and exhilarating, both inconvenient and elating --the impossibility of arriving at any defined certainty. But for seekers, this is good news; we get to explore the story creatively together. On a day as significant as Easter, it is not the literal truth of the doctrine of the resurrection that we seek, but the living, inconvenient truth that can undergird our lives.

At the first streaks of dawn, as John tells it, Mary comes alone to the tomb and finds the stone rolled away. She runs back to tell Peter and the beloved disciple, John, who return

to find that she is right. In an interesting twist, it is the men who run from that place, scared, alone and depressed.

But Mary stays there, lost in the moment, weeping and alone. She looks again inside the tomb and sees two angels and asks them where the body is. Outside again, the gardener approaches her and asks why she is weeping. "Sir if you have taken him, tell me where you have put him." The gardener responds, "Mary" and in that moment, the meaning of Easter becomes clear to her; she recognizes the possibility of love in the midst of a broken world. "Teacher." She reaches for him and then back to separation once again as Jesus tells her, "Do not hold onto me," or in other Bible translations, "Touch me not." It's a powerful statement about the confrontation with death and losing the one you love most in the world. The words exchanged are a powerful dance between isolation and community, closeness and separation, life and death. Now it's her turn to let go, to gather her life together and face the world on her own.

The resurrection story of Jesus is confusing, troublesome to many, inconvenient to others. We cannot prove the resurrection, but we can open ourselves to its deepest meaning, just as Mary did for that single instant of recognition, standing alone in the Garden. We can allow the mystery of the story to simmer in our hearts before going on with life as usual. If the risen Christ is to be a presence among us, a liberating force for love and hope of a new day, the story must find its place in us.

For any of us who have loved and lost, and there probably isn't a person here in this room who hasn't experienced some sort of loss, we have an inkling of Mary's experience. It would be impossible for me to enter into this day without the hope of bearing witness to the strength of the resurrection in my life. In the past four years, I have walked through the grief of losing my father, my mother, and most recently, my 43-year old sister-in-law. Each of these losses has changed how I walk through this world; each loss has cut me to my core – and yet, each one has revealed love in ways I am still awakening to. Like Mary, I don't need life after death half as much I want to know that there is love after death. Love is death-defying! Easter is about knowing, in the words of Forrest Church, "that after we die, only the love we have given away during the course of our lives surely endures." It is enough.

Today, I awoke, faced with the possibility of joy. A deep, but fragile joy in knowing that after death, it is love alone that matters. The tie that binds gives us strength to carry on; it even gives us courage to be better, stronger and kinder people. After everything is finished; love remains, pure, strong, gentle, chiding and sweet.

This year, look for the Risen Christ going before you in the world. Look where people are paying attention to the world and to the needs of others. Look to the pain, the loss, and the suffering of others around the world and here in our own country, in our own communities. Look to where there are those who respond with mercy and concern: to brave youth speaking out for anti-gun legislation, to those writing letters for Amnesty

International, for those supporting and working with refugee families, for voices for truth and reconciliation with First Nations brothers and sisters, and in the simple acts of clean up after a memorial service, sharing an act of generosity, or inviting someone who lives alone to Easter dinner.

Wherever we see heroes of love, who seek to work beyond the borders of individual gain and happiness, there we will see the Risen Christ standing arms open in the midst.

So let us all seek consolation in that love which never dies, and find peace in the dazzling grace that always is. Life is more powerful and deeply beautiful when we let ourselves love as deeply as we have been loved by God. Today, we pray that Christ be resurrected in us, that we may love and forgive each other, becoming a community of hope--a justice seeking, always loving, Body of Christ in the world.

Today, something incredible has happened. Jesus is risen! Love lives!

Thanks be to God. Amen.