

Easter Sunday, April 16, 2017

Rev. Dr. Jean Halligan Vandergrift
Rendezvous with the Risen One

Matthew 28:1-10 & Hebrews 12:1-3

MATTHEW 28:1-10

INTRODUCTION:

The disciples of Jesus were scattered in fear after the events of recent days, and the female followers that had witnessed the cruel crucifixion only knew to stay close to the place where he had been buried. All of his friends were dealing with the trauma in their own ways, when Mary Magdalene and the other Mary rose early and made their way to the tomb.

READING:

After 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 worshipped him. ¹⁰Then Jesus said to them, 'Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.'

HEBREWS 12:1-3

INTRODUCTION:

The "Hebrews" to whom this letter was written were actually second generation Christians, one generation removed from those that had been contemporaries of Jesus and the early disciples. What we can tell from the letter is that the church was in a crisis of faith. Some had grown lax in attendance and their commitment was lagging. They also may have been facing ridicule from society, so the writer is reminding them how to live like Christ in their time, and encouraging them to keep going forward.

READING:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, ²looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of ^{*}the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, ^{*} so that you may not grow weary or lose heart.

SERMON:

One of the summer jobs I had during high school was with Norrell Temporary Services. These were office jobs that lasted a few days to a few weeks, usually filing or inventory projects that didn't take a great deal of skill and less imagination. One boring job, before technological advances, was putting together a company catalogue. For two eight-hour days, my sister and I walked around a table in a windowless storage room collating and combining stacks of pages into the finished product.

The word "rendezvous" is from the French verb "se rendre," literally meaning, "present yourself," "report for duty," "show up." I presented myself at these jobs. It was good, straightforward work, and I was glad for it, but I came to it without any expectations or anticipation.

There are many situations in which we simply present ourselves. You and I show up at work or at the dentist. We pay our taxes, vote, and meet our deadline at the DMV, all without hoping for a meaningful experience. We may even come to church and pray without much feeling or anticipation. Though we present ourselves in these circumstances, I bet we don't think of these activities as *rendezvouses!*

Well, Mary Magdalene and Mary Without-a-Last Name went to the tomb without any allusions or expectations of seeing Jesus. Matthew doesn't indicate that they went with anointing spices to care for the body, for instance, because they knew the stone would prevent them. Jesus was dead. It was over. They presented themselves at the tomb after the trauma to remain close to him in memory; they went through the motions without emotion.

BUT there is another experience of "rendezvous."

After seven years at my pastorate in Fayetteville, NC, I was granted a three-month sabbatical; one month was spent at my old seminary in Kentucky as "Minister in Residence." So I was away from Steve and Nathan that long time. Once I was coming home, Steve and I decided to meet in the middle for a few days alone, at a place in the Smokies. We set the date and coordinated our arrival times. Now *that* was a rendezvous!

At the 1936 Democratic National Convention, Franklin Delano Roosevelt sought to rally and capture the collective imagination of the country. He wanted the nation to do more than just show up, saying to it: "This generation of Americans has a rendezvous with destiny."¹

I'm also thinking of those precious moments when we gather by the bedside of a loved one who is dying. We hug. We say what needs to be said. We may sing hymns and pray as this one

¹I read the entire speech at this website: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=15314>

prepares to meet her loved ones and the Lord. The last breath often provokes “a holy, broken ‘Hallelujah.’² A true rendezvous.

So the two women didn’t come to Easter with anticipation. Yet an earthquake shook their world, inside and out. The angel patted them on the shoulder and said, “Don’t be afraid,” then commissioned them to share the news with the disciples that “Jesus has been raised and is going *before* you, like a pioneer, into Galilee. There you will see him!” **So it was that anticipation entered and their trip turned into a true *rendezvous***, a way of expectation that was to continue in the early church. **Because according to the Easter story, you and I have an appointment, a meeting, a rendezvous to keep with the risen Christ**, next year, tomorrow, and today.

What might it look like in your ordinary living or in this congregation, if you approached the message of Easter this way? Going into work, if you connected with Christ, wouldn’t this new outlook help you make links to your passion? In today’s big, complex, bad, violent world, wouldn’t knowing that we have a meeting with God, start to clarify how you and I participate in democracy? Wouldn’t coming to prayer, anticipating a divine word, change your life? In the case of the Marys, they became *alive* as they *ran* to the rendezvous with Christ and with the scattered disciples in Galilee.

If we trust that the Risen One is going before us and that we’ll see him in *all* aspects of living, these rendezvous will make us alive too. Let us run the marathon set before *us*, our focus upon meeting Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. Alleluia!

²Leonard Cohen, lyrics from “Hallelujah.”