

SERMONS FROM ST. FRANCIS

Easter Sunday

April 8, 2007 –

Text: John 20:1-8

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“Mary Waited”

It was dark. It was cold. Peter and John had run away leaving Mary Magdalene alone. Peter and John had run away convinced that Jesus’ body had been stolen. One more humiliation to add to a horrible day and night of death. But Mary stayed in that cemetery. In the dark. In the cold of the predawn glimmer.

Mary was cold. Mary was alone. Mary was in the dark. Not only physically, but in the depths of her spirit. So Mary stayed and waited –and wept.

There are times in our own lives when we feel we are left in the dark, in the cold, so alone that we have to cry. It is as if a huge stone, like that of Jesus’ tomb, has been rolled between us and our happiness.

Life is always full of surprises. But sometimes those surprises are like running to the tomb and finding it empty. Finding our faith in God empty. Finding our plans in life empty. Finding our hopes and dreams empty.

And **do** we **not**, like Peter and John, assume the worst –running away and back into life a little more jaded, a little more cynical, a little more hardened towards people and towards this whole bag of tricks called life itself?

And why? Perhaps because it is a survival technique we have inherited deeply in our cerebral cortex –cut your losses, stanch your wounds and run.

I remember receiving my little kitten, Sox, from her mother. Sox was so small, she fit in the palm of my hand. But during the first week in her new home I witnessed something I have never forgotten. She would go to the front door or to a window and scream with all her might –and it was loud for a little kitten. She was calling for her mother. She did this for several days and then one morning she screamed so loud and so long she startled me. When I ran to her she could not be found anywhere.

That night she just appeared out of nowhere –and it dawned on me: she had hidden herself, just as cats always do when they are dying, but this time to grieve the loss of her mother, which was a death in the heart of that little kitten. She has never screamed again. She just moved on in her life –and it is a wonderful life seeing her grow and be mentored by big Buddy, my other cat.

So also with Peter and John. They concluded, falsely but understandably, that it was all a loss – that Jesus’ body had been stolen. “But who cares now? It’s over. We have to think of survival. We have to think about the authorities coming after us and killing us too. We have to think about steeling ourselves for the worst and getting out of town as secretly as possible. The stone, rolled away from the tomb, has been rolled in front of us making our dreams with Jesus –an empty tomb.” Scream out like Sox at the universe and move on. It’s over. It’s over. Move on and die a little! ...But Peter and John missed something big.

My mother had a ditty. It’s a stereotype and I ask for your indulgence on that. But whenever her three sons would lose their tempers she would rattle off:

*Patience is a virtue, Possess it if you can,
Always in a women, Never in a man!*

Such a generalization, of course, doesn't really hold true. But it fits the reactions at the opened tomb of Jesus this morning. Mary waits, while Peter and John impatiently run off in order to give up the whole venture in sadness. And they miss something.

But Mary waits behind in the garden by the tomb. She has just enough patience to wait behind, to wait... She's still in the dark. She still feels the cold. She's still in a cemetery. She's screaming at the universe at her loss in her own way. She's weeping. She's grieving. But she has patience to wait a little. And that makes all the difference in the world. All the difference in the world.

We live in a city that prides itself as being secular, atheistic or at least agnostic. Patience, patience. If our beloved neighbors would hang around a bit in what they think this cemetery they would find God-belief was not about theism or celestial puppetry. If they hang around a bit, the emotional and intellectual life that's blocked by a stone, could be rolled away.

As we walked the Stations of the Cross around the Castro on Friday, at 16th Street and Church a man shouted out continually, "Jesus was gay and I am too." All passed by without comment, but I went back to him, thanked him for sharing his conviction, then said, "Most of the clergy in this procession are gay too." He looked quite surprised at this revelation and thanked me. Yes, patience is needed all the way around or the stone of death will block us all in our assumptions and prejudices.

But not the stone in front of Mary. She waits. And because she waits, because she possesses a little patience in her darkened journey, those dark, cold journeys we all must suffer, because she waits, she will learn that it was not humans who rolled the stone away in defeat, but God in victory. God rolled the stone away to open up the future for her life –not to block it. Mary waited in patience and became the patient of the Great Physician.

When life gets you down. When you feel alone, cold and sad, wait for the Word that calls across the cemetery of your situation. Wait a little. Wait for the Word. And just as that voice of an angel spoke to Mary, a Word will grace your presence too. Someone or something will say, "What's wrong? Why are you weeping?" Wait to become a patient of the Great Physician.

For Christ will come to you and surprise you with joy –joy in the midst of your sadness, strength in the midst of your weakness, freedom in the midst of your bondage. God rolled that first stone away. God will roll away the stones that block your life to reveal that Christ appears in the cemeteries of our situations.

Sometimes it pays to wait, to linger to discern a different meaning to our disasters, disappointments and losses. God's saving Word will come forth. As we grieve over Gloria Siech who left us on Good Friday, we know as we wait, that the stone that blocks our way, will be moved by the good Word: Christ is risen for us! This is the meaning of Easter and this is always the meaning of the church's continual good news for the whole world. Alleluia! Christ is Risen! Happy Easter to you all! Amen

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