

Easter Sunday, March 31, 2013
Rev. Diane Monti-Catania

Sermon – “From Sorrow to Joy”

Today is a heart day.

Today is a day of faith born strictly of love.

There is no proof of Christ’s resurrection.

There were no witnesses to the event – only to the morning after.

There are no confirmed pieces of the linen wrap on display at museums.

There are no photographs or news reports or archived evidence that tells us that Mary’s story is true.

There is only faith.

There is only the deep knowing inside of us that says that this glorious story that has endured for thousands of years has the power to inspire, to transform.

This is a story that promises life where there was death.

Today we find Mary weeping outside the tomb.

We weep when our hearts are broken.

When our sorrow is deepest we turn to God.

Weeping is a gift that God bestows upon humans to help us express our anguish.

Jesus wept when Lazarus died.

Jesus wept as he prepared to enter Jerusalem.

Jesus wept in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Peter wept bitterly when he looked into the eyes of the Christ he had denied.

At times of death we cry out, seeking comfort, explanation – longing for an embrace that will ease our pain.

Sorrow begs prayer.

When we experience the deep sadness that comes with loss or pain we need to talk to God – directly, from our heart.

It is when we feel most broken and vulnerable that we need the power of the one who created us.

There is no such thing as a life free from sorrow, which is why there is no such thing as life away from God.

We cry out, in despair, but also in hope.

Hope is what moves us out of the darkness and into the light.

It is hope that reminds us that sorrow will pass.

Mary Magdalene embodies this transition in today's Easter story.

Her sorrow is overwhelming at having lost Jesus, first to death and then, she thinks, to theft.

She cries out to the man she supposes is the gardener, "Please tell me where you have laid him, I will take him away."

We too, often cry out, seeking God's help in moving us from sorrow to joy.

Mary is rewarded by Jesus' disclosure that it is he, who has risen from the dead and will remain a presence in her life.

We share in this resurrection experience when we recognize that Jesus has conquered death – so that even after death, there is still love. There is still joy.

J. Linman said "It is our intimacy with Christ in faith, our sharing in the divine life, that makes it possible for us to believe the unbelievable and to proclaim that which defies explanation"

The Easter story invites us to embrace the mystery of life each day, "to learn to become both those who are enlivened by God's resurrection life, and, those who bring resurrection to the people around us.

We bring resurrection to others through service, welcome, generosity, compassion, solidarity, dignity and love.

When the resurrection becomes a reality that infiltrates our lives and our beings, it transforms us into those whose every thought, word, action, value and attitude celebrates and releases life into our world."

The proof of God's awesome power is in our very lives.

We must embrace this power and embody it.
We must become the living Christ in our world.

We must not be shy about our faith.

We must not turn it into platitudes and spiritual musings.

In John Updike's beautiful poem, *Seven Stanzas at Easter* he says,

"Let us not mock God with metaphor,

Analogy, sidestepping, transcendence,

Making of the event a parable,

a sign painted in the faded Credulity of earlier ages:

Let us walk through the door.

The stone is rolled back, not papier-mache,

Not a stone in a story,

But the vast rock of materiality that in the slow grinding of Time will eclipse for each of us

The wide light of day."

You are invited into the wide light of this day.

You are invited into the place where life overcomes death.

You are invited to share in the promise that the light has come into the world and the darkness cannot overcome it.

This Easter promise is the foundation of our faith.

Sometimes people ask me how they can "get faith."

They want to be able to acquire the peace and certainty that comes from following Jesus.

My reply is simple.

I suggest that they "choose it."

Choose to live a life based on the values of love, humility, patience, endurance, charity, faithfulness, kindness, tolerance, compassion, gratitude and understanding.

Choose to live in a community that cares about one another – about the common good.

Choose to seek comfort in times of distress.

Choose to marvel at the power that created you and provides you with air to breath and sunshine to warm your days.

Choose to find yourself in today's passage.

When you choose to believe the resurrection account you are choosing to believe in a power greater than anything imaginable.

Once you have chosen to follow Christ, you must engage in the work of being a Christian.

Christianity is not passive.

You make a commitment to spread the good news of the gospel throughout the world-to teach by example.

The most effective way to shine Christ's light is by living our values everyday.

We must be a walking, breathing, testament to God's power.

In preparation for today we have spent the past six weeks of Lent focusing on two important values, forgiveness and prayer.

We learned that forgiveness and prayer are both verbs – a way of life.

Letting go of resentments and past hurts frees us to live in the present. Scripture tells us to “forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”

We worked together, as a community, to embrace the power of forgiveness so that we might approach this holy day with hearts filled with love.

We also spent time reflecting on the life-giving power of prayer.

We reflected on Anne Lamott's suggestion that “Help, Thanks, and Wow” are the basic elements of prayer.

It is interesting to apply Lamott's approach to our Easter story.

Certainly Mary Magdalene and the disciples were praying for God's help in determining their future after Christ's crucifixion.

Oh God, what shall we do now? Help us – our leader is gone. Help us.

Upon learning that Christ was present in the garden I'm quite certain that Mary clung to him with whispered words of thanks.

Thank you, God. Thank you, God. Thank you God.

And WOW is really the most appropriate response to the story of the resurrection.

WOW God – I can't believe that you can take everything that we believe to be true and turn it around.

WOW God – It is truly amazing that death is not the end of life.

WOW God – You really do have the power to turn sorrow into joy.

WOW God – I can't believe that you love me so much that you would do all of this for me.

WOW God – what can I do for you?