

Easter Sunday, April 16, 2017

“He is Risen: The Stones Speak” Psalm 118: 20-24 John 20: 1-18

First United Church of Arvada Rev. Karin Kilpatric

We gather this Easter morning in an increasingly anxious and sorrow filled world. Not a day goes by that we don't hear of public or personal tragedy; mudslides or bombings, poison gas, fatal viruses, sudden deportations, or simply a friend's diagnosis of cancer. We tremble, we fume and we groan with grief for self and others. Some days it is difficult to feel the hope of our resurrection faith—the hope that reassures us that God is alive, here with us, present in all of this.

On Easter morning, we are invited to walk with Mary of Magdala and the other disciples to the open tomb. As the light of dawn beckons and awakens our sight, we see the rock rolled away and the vestiges of death-- the linens in which Christ's body had been wrapped—thrown aside. We are told that this resurrection happens on the first day of the week. Suddenly it is not just the dawn of a new morning but also the dawn of a new day in the life of humanity, the advent of a new consciousness coming into the world. What happens next varies in the different stories. In Matthew's version there is a great earthquake and an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, comes and rolls back the stone and sits on it. It varies in Gospel versions, and in our own imaginations of them, but the empty tomb, is always front and center. This rock, an image of stability and permanence, whispers to us in the silence of the new day. Hallelujah, He is risen. Suddenly, in a familiar

ancient story of an empty tomb, hope again, finds its footing and comes alive.

This month is poetry month, a month set aside to honor the mystery and beauty of language with its power to capture truth in rhythm and image. Poetry presents us with its truth for only a brief moment before we must reenter the flow of our forgetful everyday lives. In 2014, the great poet and author, Maya Angelou, departed this world. Yet, she has bequeathed the world the treasures of her insight and passion. Her poems continue to support our lives. They are stepping-stones holding our weight and guiding our paths. One poem, from ***On the Pulse of Morning*** goes like this.

A Rock, A River, A Tree  
Hosts to species long since departed,  
Marked the mastodon,  
The dinosaur, who left dried tokens  
Of their sojourn here  
On our planet floor,  
Any broad alarm of their hastening doom  
Is lost in the gloom of dust and ages.

But today, the Rock cries out to us, clearly, forcefully,  
Come, you may stand upon my  
Back and face your distant destiny,

But seek no haven in my shadow,  
I will give you no hiding place down here.

You, created only a little lower than  
The angels, have crouched too long in  
The bruising darkness  
Have lain too long  
Facedown in ignorance,  
Your mouths spilling words  
Armed for slaughter.

The Rock cries out to us today,  
You may stand upon me,  
But do not hide your face.

“The Rock cries out to us today, you may stand upon me, but do not hide your face.” How is that for a message of Easter hope and human challenge? The empty tomb is a hallowed place to stand, as we face the demands and sorrows of this tormented world. It gives us a rock to cling to as we face our individual and collective destinies.

Author and priest, Richard Rohr, in his book, *The Naked Now: Learning to See as the Mystics See*, stands courageously and patiently right in the middle of holy mystery. He warns of the movement of religion to try to answer ultimate questions rather than to look in awe and wonder at the

cosmos. He speaks of a larger kind of seeing. He writes:

Religion has become preoccupied with telling people what to know more than how to know, telling people what to see more than how to see. We ended up seeing Holy Things faintly, trying to understand Great Things with a whittled-down mind and trying to love God with our own small and divided heart. It has been like trying to view the galaxies with a \$5 pair of binoculars...

Rohr calls this way of seeing “contemplation” “He finds that contemplation “keeps our heart and mind spaces open long enough for the mind to see other hidden material.” Contemplation keeps us in “the naked now and waits for futures given by God and grace.”

Each Easter morning we come face to face with the mystery of the resurrection of Jesus. A mystery that cannot be summed up or confirmed by the rational mind, but only contemplated by the mind guided by the open heart. Each Sunday at First United we begin worship with these words, “No matter who you are or where you are on life’s journey, you are welcome here. On this Easter morning you are welcome to join in with this gathering of seekers, sinners, doubters, and traveling souls to the rock at the empty tomb. Here we can reach out and touch the rock and take in its silent profound truth. We must not let its stillness fool us. Its life giving vibrations open our hearts to hope.

Life is short and unpredictable and at times cruel and unjust. We are vulnerable to its power to shrink our minds and hearts with false desires and idle and apathetic forgetfulness. In the politically

tumultuous world in which Jesus lived, he too was vulnerable to being broken. He was framed by the good religious folks of his time. He was scapegoated. He was targeted. He was hung on a cross to die by people seeking personal power and control who were determined to silence anyone who threatened it. Yet he would not crouch in the bruising darkness. But even from the cross he faced this darkness with forgiveness.

Each Easter, the rock of the empty tomb whispers intimately to us. He is risen. He lives. Listen to its wisdom. We have crouched too long in the bruising darkness. We have lain too long facedown in ignorance. Our mouths have spilled-words armed for slaughter— we have listened to these words by others whose false claims we have too often accepted.

The message of Easter offers each of us life abundant. Take this life giving spirit into your own being. Open your mind and heart and body to its saving grace and come alive with a spirit that will bless your life. Find the words and actions worthy of Christ's life, death and resurrection—words and actions worthy of the life you, yourself, have been given. Don't hide your face, but stand on the rock and speak with honesty and courage. You are no better than the person beside you or the one across any false boundary of race, or religion, or nationality, or gender, or economic wealth, or education, or political party. When you stand on the rock and take in God's spirit, it will not puff you up with invincible knowledge or saintly piety, but only with the power of love

and humility to cross over the boundaries between you and others,  
between you and your God.

I will close with a poem, which speaks of the connection between the human spirit and the physical world. It recognizes the physical world's origin in the being of God. It understands that death will always give way to life transformed. It was written by the great Sufi poet, Rumi.

I died from a mineral, and plant became.  
Died from the plant and took a sentient frame;  
Died from the beast, and donned a human dress;  
When by dying did I e'er grow less;  
Another time from manhood I must die  
To soar with angel-pinions through the sky.  
'Midst Angels also I must lose my place,  
Since "Everything shall perish save His Face."

The Psalmist reminds us of the sacred stone that was rejected by the world.

The stone that the builders rejected  
has become the chief cornerstone.  
This is the Lord's doing;  
it is marvelous in our eyes.

It is Easter morning. We cannot hide our face but must come "face to face" with the resurrection truth. The empty tomb is the cornerstone on which our lives are built and our days are lived-- with an abundance of hope--in the presence of God.

This is the day that the Lord has made;  
let us rejoice and be glad in it.