

Empty Tomb or Womb?

John 20:1-18

April 12, 2020

The sense of emptiness is palpable this day. Our sanctuaries are empty, absent the glorious music, beautiful décor, and bustling crowds typical of Easter Sunday. Schools, most stores, businesses, restaurants are empty, lifeless, unmoving.

The stark emptiness reflects a hollowness in our spirits, the loss of gatherings with family and friends, the loss of in-person worship with our community of faith, the loss of activities which have been meaningful.

On that first Easter morn, Mary experiences a similar desolation. While the men return home, she lingers weeping at the open tomb. The dark emptiness reflects the sadness and sorrow of her heart. She weeps for the lost relationship with her Savior. She weeps for the now hollow dreams which Jesus had inspired for her personal life and her world. Her hopes have vaporized, never to be realized.

Mary's heart is shattered, and yet she dares to look into the abyss of emptiness. She dares to confront and name her loss: "they have taken away my Lord." When she looks into the tomb, she sees angels, messengers of God, a sign that God is here, even in this horrible experience. God has not abandoned her. And then the risen Christ appears, speaking her name.

Even in the midst of grief, Mary is fully present to the moment. By being present, she is open to possibility – and the possibility of resurrection is revealed. Her spirit is refreshed and a new pathway is opened to her. She has not hit a dead end; the risen Christ opens up the future.

Our lives flow largely from our expectations. The more we are able to be present in our fullest selves to any moment or situation, the more likely we are to see angels instead of emptiness, and to know how deeply we are accompanied.

Our current circumstances leave us facing the emptiness of lost plans, events, opportunities, and more. If we expect only to experience loss, that is indeed what we will find. But if we expect to find possibility, even meaning, in this shut-down, new avenues will be offered to us. If we expect to feel isolated, we will be lonely. If we anticipate that God will accompany us, we will experience God's companionship.

When we are intentional, we can see how God is present with us. Nearly four years ago activist Valarie Kaur, faithful in Sikh faith, asked, "What if this

darkness is not the darkness of the tomb, but the darkness of the womb?”ⁱ If we dare to look into the emptiness to see angels bearing the presence of God, we catch a glimpse of the possibility of new life coming to birth. Out of barren soil, compassion is emerging in new ways. Fallow relationships are springing to life once again. Dead ends are being forged into new pathways. This is the work of God among us, bringing light in the midst of darkness, transforming emptiness into the fullness of divine presence.

On this Easter Day, let us join Mary in being open to possibility, even the possibility of resurrection from this challenging desolation in which we find ourselves. In the midst of our emptiness, Jesus shows up, calling you by name. “I am here with you, leading you to new life. Be not afraid. Come rise with me.”

May the blessing of Christ’s eternal companionship strengthen you and raise you to new life.

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ⁱ Valarie Kaur, “A Sikh Prayer for America on November 6, 2016, <https://valariekaur.com/2016/11/a-sikh-prayer-for-america-on-november-9th-2016/>