Pastoral Letter for Easter 2021

Greetings! I am absolutely convinced that your celebration of Easter will be what you make it this year. You may choose to attend worship, or watch it on Livestream, you may choose to gather with a few members of your family or your closest friends. You may even choose to conduct your family visit via Zoom. My prayer for you is that you will intentionally ‘celebrate’ Easter this year.

It has been a year that was difficult to count one’s blessings but once you had come to terms that the world was changed forever, you began to adjust. You began to approach your own life and the relationships around you in a new way. Did you know that is what the Easter story is all about?

Let me begin by stating that I have chosen to reflect on the Gospel of John 20:1-18. In this Gospel we encounter Mary in the dark hours of the morning: alone and frightened. Perhaps you are one of the people who are awake in the early hours of the morning reflecting on loss, pain, fear, or anxiety for the future. Mary was one of those people too. Her life had suddenly become empty and she was searching for God. More specifically, she was grieving the death of Christ.

Some of us choose to be alone in our darkest hours and others choose to search out companionship. Simon Peter and another disciple came to be with her at the tomb that morning. Mary’s confusion, grief, and perhaps even anger at those responsible for her situation left her in a state of doubt.

The good news came in the blink of an eye. Mary and the other disciples were shocked that Jesus’ body was gone from the tomb. Each one of us comes to faith in our own way. I am sure you have your own experiences. I am also sure that you have noticed in the Gospel story that even when the disciples left the tomb with their renewed faith, Mary stayed. Perhaps you have had moments whereby you remained in a state of chaos, confusion, and uncertainty. Maybe even in a situation that left you in tears. Maybe Mary was reflecting on her situation when God sent an angel to be by her side. Perhaps you have had a moment of an encounter with the Holy…just when you were about ready to give up.

I have always been amazed by the question presented by the angel, ‘whom do you seek?’ At Easter, you might want to ask, ‘whom do I seek?’ Is Jesus a figure in history for you? Is Christ an intellectualized conclusion for you? Is he a person of interest or analysis for you? Or is he the Christ who transforms lives?

When Jesus spoke with Mary, she had a powerful awareness that she was in the presence of the transformed Christ. You would have thought that there would have been much more conversation but instead Jesus sent her on a mission to tell others that He was alive and eager to engage them. His parting thought was, ‘do not hold me…go to my brother’. It is a strange thing that you and I have learned in the last year. We cannot hold onto the past. We cannot hold onto those things that we once thought we knew for sure. Our faith is not lived in isolation. Faith is strongest when lived with those we love. Faith is strongest when it is shared. My prayer for you this Easter is that you have a ‘Mary experience’ with the Lord. This will come in the presence of the Holy sent by God. Our responsibility is to be aware and ready for that encounter. Try to remember that our Lord has a sense of humor and you may feel that the representative He sends was the least likely of all possibilities. God can be like that sometimes.

Today’s gospel concludes with Mary visiting the disciples announcing, ”I have seen the Lord”. Although none of us were standing there that day, we can well imagine that the disciples wanted to ‘understand’ what they were being told. Many people over the last several centuries have tried to understand the resurrection of our Lord. They search for some logical explanation. They search for answers. Is it worth mentioning to you that even those who touched Jesus after the resurrection still did not understand everything? Instead, they ‘knew’. You and I ‘know’ things that we don’t necessarily understand. But how do we know something is true? To put it quite simply, because what we know has transformed out lives.

The celebration of Easter can be a life transforming experience. You may be transformed by the scripture, by the music, or even the preaching. You may be transformed by the liturgy, or even by chance, by a child that looks up at you and says, ‘Happy Easter’. Even if they don’t understand it all, they know it to be true.

Easter is about a fresh experience of Christ. Easter is about new life and new experiences. May you be prayerfully intentional about embracing the Holy moments of Easter.

Yours in Christ,

The Rev. Dr. Stephen Hendry

Priest and Pastor