

**Readings and Reflections from the Easter Vigil 2020 St Andrew Catholic Church  
Simon Ahiokhai, Rachel Wheeler, Fr Chuck Lienert, Michael R. Prendergast,  
Martha Gies and Tom Caruso**

Genesis 1:1-2:2

In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth,  
the earth was a formless wasteland, and darkness covered the abyss,  
while a mighty wind swept over the waters.

Then God said,  
"Let there be light," and there was light.  
God saw how good the light was.  
God then separated the light from the darkness.  
God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night."  
Thus evening came, and morning followed—the first day.

Then God said,  
"Let there be a dome in the middle of the waters,  
to separate one body of water from the other."  
And so it happened:  
God made the dome,  
and it separated the water above the dome from the water below it.  
God called the dome "the sky."  
Evening came, and morning followed—the second day.

Then God said,  
"Let the water under the sky be gathered into a single basin,  
so that the dry land may appear."  
And so it happened:  
the water under the sky was gathered into its basin,  
and the dry land appeared.  
God called the dry land "the earth, "  
and the basin of the water he called "the sea."  
God saw how good it was.  
Then God said,  
"Let the earth bring forth vegetation:  
every kind of plant that bears seed  
and every kind of fruit tree on earth  
that bears fruit with its seed in it."  
And so it happened:  
the earth brought forth every kind of plant that bears seed  
and every kind of fruit tree on earth  
that bears fruit with its seed in it.  
God saw how good it was.  
Evening came, and morning followed—the third day.

Then God said:

"Let there be lights in the dome of the sky,  
to separate day from night.  
Let them mark the fixed times, the days and the years,  
and serve as luminaries in the dome of the sky,  
to shed light upon the earth."

And so it happened:

God made the two great lights,  
the greater one to govern the day,  
and the lesser one to govern the night;  
and he made the stars.  
God set them in the dome of the sky,  
to shed light upon the earth,  
to govern the day and the night,  
and to separate the light from the darkness.  
God saw how good it was.  
Evening came, and morning followed—the fourth day.

Then God said,

"Let the water teem with an abundance of living creatures,  
and on the earth let birds fly beneath the dome of the sky."

And so it happened:

God created the great sea monsters  
and all kinds of swimming creatures with which the water teems,  
and all kinds of winged birds.  
God saw how good it was, and God blessed them, saying,  
"Be fertile, multiply, and fill the water of the seas;  
and let the birds multiply on the earth."  
Evening came, and morning followed—the fifth day.

Then God said,

"Let the earth bring forth all kinds of living creatures:  
cattle, creeping things, and wild animals of all kinds."

And so it happened:

God made all kinds of wild animals, all kinds of cattle,  
and all kinds of creeping things of the earth.  
God saw how good it was.

Then God said:

"Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.

Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea,  
the birds of the air, and the cattle,  
and over all the wild animals  
and all the creatures that crawl on the ground."

God created man in his image;  
in the image of God he created him;  
male and female he created them.

God blessed them, saying:

"Be fertile and multiply;

fill the earth and subdue it.

Have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air,  
and all the living things that move on the earth."

God also said:

"See, I give you every seed-bearing plant all over the earth  
and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit on it to be your food;  
and to all the animals of the land, all the birds of the air,  
and all the living creatures that crawl on the ground,  
I give all the green plants for food."

And so it happened.

God looked at everything he had made, and he found it very good.

Evening came, and morning followed—the sixth day.

Thus the heavens and the earth and all their array were completed.

Since on the seventh day God was finished

with the work he had been doing,

he rested on the seventh day from all the work he had undertaken.

God put Abraham to the test.

He called to him, "Abraham!"

"Here I am, " he replied.

Then God said:

"Take your son Isaac, your only one, whom you love,  
and go to the land of Moriah.

There you shall offer him up as a holocaust  
on a height that I will point out to you."

Early the next morning Abraham saddled his donkey,  
took with him his son Isaac and two of his servants as well,  
and with the wood that he had cut for the holocaust,  
set out for the place of which God had told him.

On the third day Abraham got sight of the place from afar.

Then he said to his servants:

"Both of you stay here with the donkey,  
while the boy and I go on over yonder.

We will worship and then come back to you."

Thereupon Abraham took the wood for the holocaust  
and laid it on his son Isaac's shoulders,  
while he himself carried the fire and the knife.

As the two walked on together, Isaac spoke to his father Abraham:

"Father!" Isaac said.

"Yes, son, " he replied.

Isaac continued, "Here are the fire and the wood,  
but where is the sheep for the holocaust?"

"Son," Abraham answered,

"God himself will provide the sheep for the holocaust."

Then the two continued going forward.

When they came to the place of which God had told him,

Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it.  
 Next he tied up his son Isaac,  
 and put him on top of the wood on the altar.  
 Then he reached out and took the knife to slaughter his son.  
 But the LORD's messenger called to him from heaven,  
 "Abraham, Abraham!"  
 "Here I am!" he answered.  
 "Do not lay your hand on the boy," said the messenger.  
 "Do not do the least thing to him.  
 I know now how devoted you are to God,  
 since you did not withhold from me your own beloved son."  
 As Abraham looked about,  
 he spied a ram caught by its horns in the thicket.  
 So he went and took the ram  
 and offered it up as a holocaust in place of his son.  
 Abraham named the site Yahweh-yireh;  
 hence people now say, "On the mountain the LORD will see."

Again the LORD's messenger called to Abraham from heaven and said:  
 "I swear by myself, declares the LORD,  
 that because you acted as you did  
 in not withholding from me your beloved son,  
 I will bless you abundantly  
 and make your descendants as countless  
 as the stars of the sky and the sands of the seashore;  
 your descendants shall take possession  
 of the gates of their enemies,  
 and in your descendants all the nations of the earth shall find blessing--  
 all this because you obeyed my command."

The Word of God

Reflection: WE ARE CHILDREN OF GRACE

Simon Ahiokhai, PhD University of Portland

Tonight, we remember the origins of the early church, when fear of the unknown gripped the hearts of the first followers of Jesus. Yet, in the midst of their fears, the light of life, the glory of God's promise shattered the darkness of evil that surrounded them. It is this assurance of new life that compels the entire church to sing tonight the following words of hope in the Exultet: "Be glad, let earth be glad, as glory floods her, ablaze with light from her eternal King. Let all corners of the earth be glad, knowing an end to gloom and darkness." This night is like no other night. It is the night of our cosmic salvation. It is the night when the grip of evil is destroyed. It is the night when hope prevails. It is the night when God's fidelity to creation is realized. It is the night of

divine friendship. As though to remind the world of the promise of God, in the ancient chant of the Church, the Exultet, we proclaim repeatedly, the work of God in the cosmos that brought new life to creation. The fault of Adam becomes a Happy Fault “that earned for us so great, so glorious a Redeemer!” That which led to humanity’s downfall has become a pathway to grace. Night, that is symbolic of evil, is now blessed. God’s grace and life saturates all crevices where evil previously reigned supreme.

When we look closely at our current situation, we are tempted to despair. Too many people have died from the current pandemic. Many are afraid of their own conditions because they do not know how their bodies will respond to the virus. Many are grieving the loss of their loved ones, friends, and neighbors. Many are currently jobless and do not know what the future holds for them. There is a logical reason to be afraid of what is currently unfolding before our eyes. Yet, Christians sing, at this moment of our existence, a song of thanksgiving. What is one to be thankful for?

To address this question, let us turn to the first reading of tonight’s liturgy. It speaks of how God brought about creation. Prior to creation, darkness reigned supreme over the universe. God creates light, the light that shatters darkness. At each moment of the creating process, God proclaims the goodness of creation. Here lies our hope; that even with the distress we may experience, the goodness of creation that bears witness to God’s presence in God’s world will never succumb to the darkness of evil. As we mourn our loved ones, suffer the pain of unemployment, homelessness, the inability to gather and worship, and the many ills that have befallen our world, let us be consoled by the word of God – God’s goodness in the cosmos reigns supreme. This goodness will lead us into a new dawn. That dawn begins tonight. This is the night of grace.

Genesis 22:1-8

God put Abraham to the test.

He called to him, "Abraham!"

"Here I am, " he replied.

Then God said:

"Take your son Isaac, your only one, whom you love,  
and go to the land of Moriah.

There you shall offer him up as a holocaust  
on a height that I will point out to you."

Early the next morning Abraham saddled his donkey,  
took with him his son Isaac and two of his servants as well,  
and with the wood that he had cut for the holocaust,  
set out for the place of which God had told him.

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Then he said to his servants:

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while the boy and I go on over yonder.

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 while he himself carried the fire and the knife.  
 As the two walked on together, Isaac spoke to his father Abraham:  
 "Father!" Isaac said.  
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 but where is the sheep for the holocaust?"  
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 "God himself will provide the sheep for the holocaust."  
 Then the two continued going forward.

When they came to the place of which God had told him,  
 Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it.  
 Next he tied up his son Isaac,  
 and put him on top of the wood on the altar.  
 Then he reached out and took the knife to slaughter his son.  
 But the LORD's messenger called to him from heaven,  
 "Abraham, Abraham!"  
 "Here I am!" he answered.  
 "Do not lay your hand on the boy," said the messenger.  
 "Do not do the least thing to him.  
 I know now how devoted you are to God,  
 since you did not withhold from me your own beloved son."  
 As Abraham looked about,  
 he spied a ram caught by its horns in the thicket.  
 So he went and took the ram  
 and offered it up as a holocaust in place of his son.  
 Abraham named the site Yahweh-yireh;  
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 "I swear by myself, declares the LORD,  
 that because you acted as you did  
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 I will bless you abundantly  
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 your descendants shall take possession  
 of the gates of their enemies,  
 and in your descendants all the nations of the earth shall find blessing--  
 all this because you obeyed my command."

The Word of God

## Reflection: INTERCONNECTEDNESS

Rachel Wheeler, PhD University of Portland

We know the bones of this story. It's a story of loss and sacrifice. A story recounting divine instruction and celebrating faithful human response. Like other stories in the Bible, it's ultimately a story of transformation. While the opening affirms the episode as a testing of Abraham, we can also see how it's an opportunity for Abraham to put aside his consideration of Isaac as *a means to an end*. Remember that the promise made by God to Abraham and Sarah and confirmed again at the conclusion of this story is that they will be forebears to immense numbers of descendants ("as countless as the stars of the sky and the sands of the seashore") and that they will possess the land of their enemies. Seemingly, the means to fulfillment of the first part of that promise is imperiled by the order to put Isaac to death. Yet, paradigmatic figure of faith that he is, Abraham willingly obeys.

This week, I have been reflecting on how often we think of others as a means to our own ends. What else is the grocery store clerk for, but to enable me to purchase needed foods? Or the agricultural laborer, but to make sure I have fresh vegetables and fruits, in season and out? What else is the health care provider for, but to enable me to recover my health when I become sick? A teacher for, but to convey to me knowledge. What else is my neighborhood park for, but to enable my body and spirit to enjoy refreshment? While we do provide each other many gifts and our vital interconnectedness is nowhere more apparent than during a period requiring us to rely on each other so heavily as now, we are invited to look at Abraham's story through the lens of our contemporary situation of severed relationships with others, in order to think about how such relationships may be renewed in the future and even be transfigured in the present.

Abraham's story of willingness to let go of the means by which he understood God's promise would be fulfilled in his life is our story, too. We are invited to attend to the ways in which we instrumentalize others and even the natural world. We are invited to lay on the altar of sacrifice our habits of thinking only of ourselves, even about things in our life that seem to be unfolding within a God-directed dimension. We are invited to be present to others as persons with their own stories to tell and their own griefs, hopes, and joys at which we can only guess. Then will we receive back our relationships with others, human and more-than-human in the Earth community, transformed. Against the backdrop of this holy week's conclusion at Easter resurrection, we listen to this story to identify ways we are called to let old ways of thinking and doing die, that the new have room to be birthed.

Exodus 14: 15-15:1

The LORD said to Moses, "Why are you crying out to me?"

Tell the Israelites to go forward.

And you, lift up your staff and, with hand outstretched over the sea,  
split the sea in two,

that the Israelites may pass through it on dry land.

But I will make the Egyptians so obstinate

that they will go in after them.  
 Then I will receive glory through Pharaoh and all his army,  
 his chariots and charioteers.  
 The Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD,  
 when I receive glory through Pharaoh  
 and his chariots and charioteers."

The angel of God, who had been leading Israel's camp,  
 now moved and went around behind them.  
 The column of cloud also, leaving the front,  
 took up its place behind them,  
 so that it came between the camp of the Egyptians  
 and that of Israel.  
 But the cloud now became dark, and thus the night passed  
 without the rival camps coming any closer together  
 all night long.  
 Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea,  
 and the LORD swept the sea  
 with a strong east wind throughout the night  
 and so turned it into dry land.  
 When the water was thus divided,  
 the Israelites marched into the midst of the sea on dry land,  
 with the water like a wall to their right and to their left.

The Egyptians followed in pursuit;  
 all Pharaoh's horses and chariots and charioteers went after them  
 right into the midst of the sea.  
 In the night watch just before dawn  
 the LORD cast through the column of the fiery cloud  
 upon the Egyptian force a glance that threw it into a panic;  
 and he so clogged their chariot wheels  
 that they could hardly drive.  
 With that the Egyptians sounded the retreat before Israel,  
 because the LORD was fighting for them against the Egyptians.

Then the LORD told Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea,  
 that the water may flow back upon the Egyptians,  
 upon their chariots and their charioteers."  
 So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea,  
 and at dawn the sea flowed back to its normal depth.  
 The Egyptians were fleeing head on toward the sea,  
 when the LORD hurled them into its midst.  
 As the water flowed back,  
 it covered the chariots and the charioteers of Pharaoh's whole army  
 which had followed the Israelites into the sea.  
 Not a single one of them escaped.  
 But the Israelites had marched on dry land  
 through the midst of the sea,  
 with the water like a wall to their right and to their left.  
 Thus the LORD saved Israel on that day  
 from the power of the Egyptians.  
 When Israel saw the Egyptians lying dead on the seashore  
 and beheld the great power that the LORD  
 had shown against the Egyptians,  
 they feared the LORD and believed in him and in his servant Moses.

Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the LORD:

I will sing to the LORD, for he is gloriously triumphant;  
horse and chariot he has cast into the sea.

The Word of God

Reflection: SACRIFICE FOR THE COMMON GOOD

Msgr. Charles J. (Fr Chuck) Lienert

The introduction to the Easter Vigil in the Lectionary says that nine readings are assigned to the Easter Vigil: seven from the Old Testament and two from the New testament. It goes on to say that if circumstances demand the number of Old testament readings may be reduced, but three selections from the Old testament should be read, although when necessary two may be read. In any case the reading from Exodus about the escape through the Red Sea should never be omitted. Why is this story of the escape from the Pharaoh's army and Egyptian slavery so important that it may never be omitted?

Ilana Pardes in her book *The Biography of Ancient Israel* persuasively identifies the birth imagery in this whole story of Exodus. Enslavement in Egypt was the cruel and oppressive tyranny which not only physically ground down the slaves forced to labor long hard hours for the profit of their oppressors, but also gradually crushed their spirits. (We are familiar with this kind of slavery in the history of our own country, a legacy which affects us to this day.) Out of fear of rebellion the Pharaoh commanded that each Hebrew male born be drown in the waters of the Nile. God chose Moses, who himself was rescued from the waters of the Nile at his birth, to lead the people out of Egypt. When the people were pressed on one side by the Red Sea and on the other by the Pharaoh's army God broke the waters of the Sea and the people passed through the divided waters and a new nation was born, freed from slavery. The story of the birth of Israel begins here in Exodus and continues through the book of Numbers.

This passage is so important because the imagery of passing through the water is the sign of new birth in the liturgy of baptism during the Easter Vigil, when the elect pass through the waters of the baptismal font and are freed from the slavery of sin and born to a new life in Christ. It is also during the Easter Liturgy that we, when we renew our baptismal vows and are sprinkled with the water of baptism, recall our own baptism when we were born into that life in Christ.

For the first time in memory most of us will not celebrate Easter with our community participating in powerful Easter Liturgy. We will not renew our vows or be sprinkled with the water because we are prevented from gathering for fear of spreading covid-19. But in these days staying home is an act sacrifice for the common good.

Yesterday the Anglican Scripture scholar, N.T. Wright, spoke in a webinar about the current situation. He and his wife are confined to their small home in Oxford. One of their daughters has symptoms of the virus but they are not allowed to go and help her. If she should have to be

admitted to the hospital they will not be allowed to visit. He deeply misses gathering at the Church to pray the Holy Week Liturgy with the community. But he said he has been meditating on the Exile— “By the streams of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion.” (Psalm 137) The inability to gather does not sever our communion nor abolish the mandate of Maundy Thursday, when Jesus gave the example of service to others. As we all know some serving us at risk to themselves working in hospitals or nursing homes or grocery stores. Many are grieving the loss of loved ones or suffering in isolation. Even though we may be limited in what we can do, we can lament with those who are suffering, we can hold each other in our prayer, we can connect with each other electronically, and perhaps even have the opportunity for small acts of service.

Epistle Romans 6:3-11

Brothers and sisters:

Are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?

We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life.

For if we have grown into union with him through a death like his, we shall also be united with him in the resurrection.

We know that our old self was crucified with him, so that our sinful body might be done away with, that we might no longer be in slavery to sin.

For a dead person has been absolved from sin.

If, then, we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him.

We know that Christ, raised from the dead, dies no more; death no longer has power over him.

As to his death, he died to sin once and for all; as to his life, he lives for God.

Consequently, you too must think of yourselves as being dead to sin and living for God in Christ Jesus.

The Word of God

## Reflection: BAPTISM IS THE RADICAL EQUALIZER

Michael R. Prendergast

St. Paul tells us that our baptism is a baptism into Christ's death. We are buried with Christ and we are raised from the waters into new life just as Christ was raised from the dead. This new life is a union with Christ. Our old life is crucified with Christ. We are no longer slaves to sin. We are dead to sin, and we live for God alone.

The life that we live, we do not live as individuals, but as a community that is brought together by Christ. It is not me and Jesus, and you and Jesus, and him and Jesus and her and Jesus, and it just happens to be that we are connected to each other while we are with Jesus. But it is me and you and him and her and Jesus, together, as community of faith, as members of Christ's body. We do not gather as group of individuals that happen to be in the same place. That is what we experience when we go to a restaurant or a movie theater or a sporting event. But we are here as members of the same body, as children adopted by the same God who is like a Mother and Father of all. We are here as a group of people that loves and cares for and looks out for one another. That is living life in our baptisms. It might seem a little overwhelming, but there is no better way to live. Can you imagine what kind of witness is given to the world around us, when they see a community living together in the love of Christ?

This year we do not gather as a Church physically in this *domus ecclesial*, this house of the Church, the physical building of St. Andrew Church. Yet, we are finding other ways to live together as the holy people of God, we are discovering new ways in which we are gift to each other and new ways to walk together as the redeemed people of God. To live life together in community and to love one another as God has loved us. Because when we love each other as God loves us, we are showing to one another God's love for them.

We do not vaguely follow Christ or imitate him generally. Our discipleship has a distinctive shape, individually and collectively—a "baptismal" shape. Baptism packs an ethical punch that stamps the spirituality of the church with distinctive markers. I am thinking here now of another passage from St. Paul (Galatians 3:27-28, 4:6)—There is now no Jew or Greek, male or female...all who are baptized are one in Christ, all have the same "father," (mother), all are equal heirs, all are a royal priesthood, a people set apart; all have complementary precious gifts (charisms, graces) that are all necessary for the building up of the Body of Christ.

Baptism is the radical equalizer. The baptismal answer to all questions of distinction, discrimination, and subordination is 'no.' The Church that practices a baptismal spirituality is truly alive in diversity of every kind and in profound mutual regard. A Christian who is living out his or her baptism every day is a person who rejects the normativity of one group over another. May we the holy people of St. Andrew claim ourselves for Christ and for one another. Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!

## Gospel Matthew 28: 1-10

After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning,  
 Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb.  
 And behold, there was a great earthquake;  
 for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven,  
 approached, rolled back the stone, and sat upon it.  
 His appearance was like lightning  
 and his clothing was white as snow.  
 The guards were shaken with fear of him  
 and became like dead men.  
 Then the angel said to the women in reply,  
 "Do not be afraid!  
 I know that you are seeking Jesus the crucified.  
 He is not here, for he has been raised just as he said.  
 Come and see the place where he lay.  
 Then go quickly and tell his disciples,  
 'He has been raised from the dead,  
 and he is going before you to Galilee;  
 there you will see him.'  
 Behold, I have told you."  
 Then they went away quickly from the tomb,  
 fearful yet overjoyed,  
 and ran to announce this to his disciples.  
 And behold, Jesus met them on their way and greeted them.  
 They approached, embraced his feet, and did him homage.  
 Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid.  
 Go tell my brothers to go to Galilee,  
 and there they will see me."

The Gospel of the Lord

Reflection: DO NOT BE AFRAID

Martha Gies

In the still-dark fourth watch of the night, Mary Magdalene walks out to the tomb of Jesus and, with the dawn, the curtain goes up on Easter. For seven Sundays, we will be reminded of the myriad ways we recognize Jesus risen. He will materialize behind locked doors, proving his identity to the disciples by showing his wounds, his hands through which nails bound him to the cross, his torso lanced by a soldier to make sure he was not still alive before they pulled him down. A week later, returning to that same room, he will invite Thomas the Doubter to run his fingers into his side from whence ran water and blood. We recognize the unique sufferings of those we love. Two disciples, chatting as they walk along the road to Emmaus, don't recognize that it is Jesus himself who has been strolling at their side until, having invited him to spend the

night, they suddenly know him in that moment at table, when he lifts the loaf, breaks it, and distributes the bread. That gesture—and that expectant smile?—so unquestionably his.

On this night, as Mary Magdalene, still grieving from the shock and the horror of the crucifixion, stands baffled and frightened by the empty tomb, we recognize Jesus in the four simple words with which he greets her: “Do not be afraid!” How often he said this in his ministry: Fear not! Be not afraid! Today we know that fear and anxiety actually weaken the immune system; we understand on a whole new level the practical wisdom of his advice. Jesus knew all along that, were we able to understand God’s love and forgiveness, we could be healed of the stress and guilt that shorten our lives. Has medical science come to corroborate these two central teachings of Christ?

I remember where we left off, just before we went into lockdown: we were reading *Laudato Si’* and, in the very first chapter, came across a word I found so poignant: rapidification. It made me yearn for a slow-down that I never dreamed would actually come. Yet here we are, this Easter season of 2020, sequestered “each in the cell of himself” (to borrow words from Auden).

This year, the Easter readings are especially significant, overlaying our current predicament with an uncanny resonance. Pope Francis, in his recent interview with Austen Ivereigh, says this: “Every crisis contains both danger and opportunity. . . This is the opportunity for conversion. . . This is the time to take the decisive step, to move from using and misusing nature to contemplating it. We have lost the contemplative dimension; we have to get it back at this time.” We have been given this Easter a rare chance for contemplation, for conversion, a chance to contemplate resurrection. “Do not be afraid,” Jesus says to Mary Magdalene. “Go tell my brothers. . . they will see me.” Peace be with you.

Gospel Matthew 28: 1-10

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 Then the angel said to the women in reply,  
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 He is not here, for he has been raised just as he said.  
 Come and see the place where he lay.  
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 Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid.  
 Go tell my brothers to go to Galilee,  
 and there they will see me.”

## Reflection: THE RESURRECTION

Tom Caruso

In Matthew’s story of the resurrection the women are portrayed as coming to the tomb not with spices for anointing, not in mourning behavior, but they “went to see the tomb.” Perhaps they, of all the disciples, understood Jesus’ teaching that he must die and be raised. When they arrive, an angel tells them not to be afraid, and tells them to proclaim the resurrection to the disciples: “he has risen from the dead and now he is going ahead of you to galilee; that is where you will see him.”

Jesus himself also greets the women and again says: “do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers [and sisters] that they must leave for Galilee; there they will see me.” The disciples encounter the risen Jesus not in Jerusalem or the centers of power, and not somewhere in the heavens, but in Galilee, on the margins, the place where so much of Jesus’ mission and ministry took place. In Galilee the risen Jesus will tell the disciples, some of whom are even still hesitant and doubting, to continue his mission, to build a community of disciples, to keep the story alive and continue to teach everything he has taught, and he will always be present with them, with us.

The best commentary I have ever read on this is from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century southern preacher and theologian Clarence Jordan, so I would like to quote from him at length:

“by raising Jesus from the dead, God is refusing to take humanity’s ‘no’ for an answer. God’s saying, ‘you can kill my boy if you wish, but I’m going to raise him from the dead, and put him right smack dab down there on earth again! I’m going to raise him up, plant his feet on the earth, and put him to preaching, teaching, healing again.”

“God raised Jesus not as an invitation to us to come to heaven when we die, but as a declaration that God has now established permanent, eternal residence on earth. The resurrection places Jesus on this side of the grave – here and now – in the midst of this life. He is not standing on the shore of eternity beckoning us to join him there. He is standing beside us, strengthening us in this life. The good news of the resurrection of Jesus is not that we shall die and go home to him, but that he has risen and comes home with us, bringing all his hungry, naked, thirsty, sick, prisoner brothers and sisters with him. . . .

“On the morning of the resurrection, god put life in the present tense, not in the future. God gave us not a promise but a presence. Not a hope for the future but power for the present.... Jesus’ resurrection is not to convince the incredulous nor to reassure the fearful, but to enkindle the believers. The proof that God raised Jesus from the dead is not the empty tomb, but the full hearts of his transformed disciples....

“the thrust of the resurrection of Jesus is the reshaping of the lives of the believers to conform to his life.... “

“now this was the very clue to all of the New Testament preaching: that God had raised Jesus from the dead and we are the evidence of the resurrection.”