

Easter YB 2024

Solome and the Risen Jesus

By the Rev. Salying wong

Good morning. My name is Salome. Since Holy Week is the busiest time of the year for clergy, Pastor Salying has asked me to give the Easter sermon today. I had to consider the work of traveling to you from over 2000 years ago to get here in time. Now that I am here and I see your faces, I am glad I agreed.

I've been watching your news. Despite all that I don't understand, there's something very familiar about it. Like empire and politics. That is very familiar. But, I heard a story that broke my heart on your news. It was the story of a family who learned that one of their members died in the Baltimore bridge collapse. The brother of the deceased man remarked on how their family was doing. He said, "We are in agony." I cried for their agony. I know how that feels. The person I lost was Jesus of Nazareth.

I know on Easter, we celebrate Jesus coming back to life. But, you have to know how it was to watch him suffer and die before you begin to consider this mystery of resurrection. So, if you would bear with me, let me tell you a little about that time.

We were in agony after Jesus died. We had traveled with Jesus for years, since we answered his call to be his disciples in Galilee. I know the men who write the books make it seem that Jesus only called men, and only twelve at that. But there were more than twelve. More than men. Who do you think made dinner at the last supper? Who do you think cleaned up?

Yes, on that night of the last supper, I was making the bread when *she* walked in. She had an alabaster jar in her hand. This is the woman who anointed Jesus on the night before he died. I know that the Gospels of Matthew, Luke, and John would tell you that she anointed Jesus' feet. But, she did no such thing. Look it up.

Mark says she anointed Jesus' on the head. And that's the truth. I saw it with my own eyes. That woman was no weeping prostitute. She was a prophet. She anointed Jesus on the head to announce that he was king. That is what the prophets did—from the time Samuel anointed Saul and David as king. This anointing announced the messiah, which literally means, "anointed one"; which is the title for a king of Israel.

The men were scandalized by her authority. They complained about her wastefulness. But Jesus nipped their self-righteousness in the bud. Even though this was his coronation, he told them she was also anointing him for his burial.

Jesus would talk like that—about his dying. It always made me very uncomfortable. In fact, we had already heard three times from Jesus that he would be crucified and that he would come back from the dead. Frankly, it creeped me out. I hated crucifixion, but I hated zombies more. I imagined Jesus as a zombie coming to eat my brains. Needless to say, I didn't get it; none of us got it.

But on that Thursday night, all this talk of dying felt real. I had this pit in my stomach as I continued to prepare the meal. As I kneaded the dough for the bread, I thought about how Jesus compared God's Kingdom to a woman who kneaded leaven into the dough. Jesus would often talk about the smallest things as having great significance. Like faith like a mustard seed. Or, like the last shall be first. Or, when he welcomed the children and told us to do the same because to such as these belong the kingdom of God.

It was this theme of the small and powerless that Jesus said was God's great concern. In our day, this was so preposterous. In our day, those who had power in politics and religion were the ones who reigned. The little ones were used to support this reign, often as slaves, but most often by paying taxes. (Like I said, there is much about your news that is familiar to me.) Jesus preached about this openly and this angered those in power. Plus, he claimed to be God's son and so knew God's very heart, which was to release everyone from bondage. This would

get him killed. On this Thursday, he said it was our last supper. None of us had much appetite.

The powers crucified him on Friday. We watched him suffer. When his suffering ended, our agony continued. I moved back and forth from being numb and weeping without comfort. People would say kind words, but I heard them as if they were speaking underwater. They tried to feed me casseroles, but I had no appetite. If I slept, it was like I was sick. When I woke, the reality of Jesus' death would hit me all over again. You know, I was afraid to be alive, to live my life without him.

Two days later, the Marys and I took spices to anoint Jesus' body. We were crazy with grief. We knew he would already be decomposing, but...we had to touch him one more time. We would find a way to remove the stone, maybe hire some day laborers along the way.

All we expected was death. You visit a tomb only to visit the dead. Even though the stone was mysteriously rolled away, when I peered in, I only expected death. Imagine my alarm when the place where the body ought to be was bare and a young man in white clothes said, "Don't be alarmed!" Seriously! A little too late! I let out a scream that could wake the dead. So did Mary and the other Mary. We screamed our heads off. That young man actually put his hands over his ears, pleading with us to stop. We stifled our screams with our hands over our mouths. The young man said, "You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised. He is not here."

If I hadn't been so scared, I would have said, "What did you do with his body; what are you playing at, you sicko?!" But, you can actually be so scared, words cannot come out of your mouth. Perhaps, he was a demon who would drag us into the realms of death.

Instead he said, "Why don't we all take a deep breath, hold it and let it out slowly. Okay. I need you to leave this tomb very calmly. Go tell Peter and the others that

Jesus is going ahead of you. He will meet you in Galilee. There you will see him, as he told you.” The young man made a move toward us and we screamed again, turning on our heels, and fled from the tomb.

The Gospel of Mark ends with our silence after we fled the tomb. People complain about this lack of a happy ending in Mark. But, I for one, appreciate it. It’s open-ended and that is the nature of resurrection. Not everyone will experience it the same way. Everyone gets to have their own faith.

So, let me give you a little more of the story. The truth is the women and I were silent, except for the chattering of our teeth. We ran into the house and locked the door. We clung to each other until we calmed down. Once we got calm, I asked, not to anyone in particular, “Why did he say Galilee?” We all thought about it. Galilee was where it all began, where Jesus told us if we followed him, he would teach us how to be disciples and to fish for people. Mary, mother of James said, “The young man said that Jesus goes ahead of us. He has always gone ahead of us...” We discussed this, how Jesus was like a shepherd who led us like sheep, even when we didn’t understand. Could he really have meant what he said, that on the third day he would rise? But instead of coming back as a zombie, he is still going ahead of us, still saying, “Follow me?”

Mary Magdalene said, “I’m going back there.” I tried to dissuade her, but she refused to listen. She said, “I’m going to do a little investigation, see who might have seen something...see who might have taken his body.” And she left.

Mary and I looked at each other. “What do we do next?” our eyes said to each other. “I’ll tell Peter and the others,” said Mary. “You can try, but they’re not going to believe you.” Mary went and returned in five minutes, miffed, “Yeah, they don’t believe me.” I gave her a look that said, “I told you, so.”

Then surprising even myself, I said, “I’m going to Galilee. Jesus said we would see him there.” Mary nibbled on her nails as she watched me pack. I left as quickly as Magdalene did. I walked to Galilee.

“Did you find him there?” I bet you’re asking. Well, let me put it to you this way. Jesus was always going ahead of me. I followed. As I followed, I would see signs of his presence that he left behind for me to see, things he wanted me to do or to enjoy. Like when I nursed the lepers and became an outcast myself. Like when I received care from those who had also come to follow Jesus when I finally caught leprosy. I felt his presence when we washed one another’s feet or shared bread and wine. For me resurrection is a practice, not an event.

I heard that Mary Magdalene had indeed seen the Lord. But, when she told the men, they didn’t believe her. They had to see Jesus themselves. They got to touch his risen body. I did not get such an experience. I imagine most of you have not either. Some do, some don’t. I used to wonder why Jesus didn’t appear to me, like he did to Mary and the others. I used to wonder if I wasn’t worthy. With time, I came to see how Jesus trusted in me by *not* giving me concrete proof. Concrete is inanimate. My faith is not a proposition I believe, but a relationship that is in search of the one I love. It has its ups and downs; it is alive and animate. Jesus has appeared to me in the bodies of those whom I have loved and those who have loved me. Today, when I look at your faces, when I look into your heart—I see Jesus in you, too. I know all the agony and joy you carry and how Jesus comes to you even now. So, I say yes, “The Lord is risen; he is risen indeed. Alleluia.”

“Well, I’m going to let Pastor Salying get back to the liturgy now. I’m going back to the first century. It’s a long road and I’m so much older here. You all have a blessed Easter. Children, enjoy your egg hunt. Just know, the egg is a symbol of life that emerges from a tomb. When you see that your parents are having a hard day, bless them by saying, “I am the new life that comes from you.” God bless you, all.”