

## **Getting dressed for Easter**

Do you know what my kids love to wear? Sweatpants. Know what they hate - button shirts. You'll notice they submitted to my will this morning and dressed up. I bribed them with hats. I can remember the year I thought that I was clearly old enough for real panty hose as opposed to the little socks with lace on them that I thought made me look childish in my brand new easter dress. I eventually submitted to my mama's will on that Easter too - and have reached an age where I want to go back to the lacy socks and never wear panty hose again. If you have ever fought with your parents - or perhaps a child over Easter Sunday church attire - then you know - that Easter has many more emotions than just joy-filled celebration.

## **Scripture**

We short change the Easter Story when we fail to notice how broad the feelings of this resurrection day really were. Even on this day of celebration, the scripture makes space for a variety of reactions and realities. The day begins in deep grief and despair - Mary goes to the tomb in the dark before dawn. She is devastated and it is about to get worse. When she gets to the tomb, the stone has been rolled away - and she assumes the most logical reality - someone has stolen the body. Can you imagine the pain of discovering that someone has disturbed the remains of someone you truly loved? She rushes to tell the other disciples and Peter and presumably John, the beloved disciple follow her back - running. They are in shock. They are also afraid. The threat to their lives is very real and so coming out of hiding to check the tomb is probably a great risk to these disciples.

They go into the tomb - they see that it is empty. And while the scripture does not necessarily clue us in to how they are feeling - we can imagine incredulity - perhaps some anger and fear as natural responses. As well as confusion and a sense of being overwhelmed. And in the midst of that turmoil, what the scripture does say is that they believed even though they did not understand.

It's not clear what exactly they believe - maybe they do believe that there has been a resurrection. Maybe they believe in the sense not of intellectual assent but to believe - the action of belief - to more firmly act in love and consistency with who Jesus was - to remain in solidarity with someone so threatening to oppressive powers that those in authority needed to hurt them more by moving his body. Whatever it is that they believe - they don't fully understand it. They don't understand all of what has happened or what God is and was doing in the empty tomb.

Which gives me pause. This belief without understanding. Could the scripture be calling us to resist the urge to think of this story - to think of today, Easter - as being about arriving at a particular certainty or clarity about the world or about God? 2000 years later have we decided that we understand in a way that even the most faithful disciples before us did not.

Cole Arthur Riley wonders, "Who are we that we would demand certainty or clarity of mystery?" She writes "many of us end up surrendering a spirituality that allows us to be curious and uncertain and free so that we can maintain some semblance of belonging, even if that means we adhere to a way of life that doesn't leave room for the truth of us...A life

that is holy," she asserts, "is a life that allows for all of your uncertainties, your curiosities, and unbelief. That doesn't just allow for them but holds them as sacred."

On the first Easter - there is a distinction made between believing - between believing God, following Jesus, living toward the kingdom - and understanding. And Peter and the other disciple return to their place of hiding still holding this tension within them.

But Mary remains - she lingers. She is stubbornly set on "fixing" it. She tells the one she supposes to be the gardener that she the body is gone and if he will just tell her where it is she will handle it - she will put it back where it belongs so that she can place it herself - in a place she can return to again and again in her grief. She will make this tragedy look like it is supposed to - like something she can more easily handle. She is not alone in wanting to fix the tragedy and pain that surrounds her.

She is snapped out of her disillusionment by the sound of her name, "Mary." Spoken by one who knows her intimately - who knows deeply her tendency to try and make things right - her compassion and her love. It is a voice she knows. Mary. Rabbouni.

I suspect her tears ran with relief and joy mixed with confusion and disbelief, sprinkled with deep, deep love. I know that Jesus tells her not to hold onto him - but I think he does not mean physically. In this moment of profound revelation and intimacy - I cannot help but picture Jesus wrapping her completely in his love - holding her and reassuring her and waiting patiently as the variety of emotions flood over and through her.

When he thinks she can take it in - he does caution her not to hold on to him. But I hear it as a caution not to hold on to the way things are right now. He is not going to stay with her in this bodily form. It's not going to be the same as it used to be - it's not going to be the same as it is right now. Things will continue to change. So don't hold onto me as you are experiencing me right now, I think he says.

Even in this resurrected moment there is still real loss. Mary and the other disciples who love Jesus so very much still lose a way of being with him that had sustained them for years. And they will have to continue to learn to be sustained in the reality of this new thing God is doing.

And so yes - siblings in faith - this story - this Easter day IS about new life. Resurrected life. Miraculous, unexpected, mysterious new life for all of us. And that is good news! Wonderful news!

But new life unfolds. New life grows. It changes and develops and evolves.

New life - resurrection - must be sought again and again - we must keep looking for it - keep interacting with it - keep being changed by it - awed by it. We must be open to it - open to the new things it is doing among us. Open to the new people it is calling us to be at this particular time and place.

And we must proclaim it - we must point it out to those around us over and over. We must proclaim new, resurrected life - in the midst of all of the fear and darkness and confusion and pain and incredulity that surrounds us. We must call it out in all of its impossibility and promise. We must proclaim - even when we cannot fully understand or when we feel like the worst choice of messengers.

We are called to declare: I have seen! I have seen the Lord! I have seen God at work! I have seen new life! I have seen resurrection- And hope! And joy! I have seen love! I have seen it! Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Amen