

## **“most this amazing day”**

John 20:1-18

April 21, 2019 – Easter Sunday

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Mary has had quite a week. It began on a positive note with the waving of palm branches and the enthusiastic welcome by Jesus' disciples into the city of Jerusalem. It's Passover week and hope for some much needed change is running high.

And then Jesus upsets a few tables in the temple, challenging the religious leadership and the tension rises. They challenge Jesus with some questions intended to trap him into exposing his radical and revolutionary nature. Mary's still with Jesus at this point. Her world was turned upside down by Jesus. She experienced the good news of God's love when Jesus healed her. She knew that Jesus' challenge of the religious authorities would release faith for the blessing of people instead of defending the status quo.

The tension is a good thing to Mary, especially as Passover approaches, when Jews celebrate their deliverance from slavery. And then the day of the meal does arrive, and Jesus is gathered with his disciples. Let's imagine that Mary Magdalene was there since at least one account indicates that there were other disciples beyond the twelve who were there. And who could claim to be more faithful than Mary?

A sacred meal where liberation is celebrated, but Jesus again refers to his forthcoming death... and not just death, but death by betrayal. The twelve, especially Peter, can't imagine it. But surely his words must have put a "pause" on her hopes. And then just one day later, Jesus is dead. And there isn't even time enough to anoint his body properly for burial because of the Sabbath. What a week!

But it doesn't stop Mary. She has a duty to perform for her Lord and so early in the morning she is up and off to the tomb. But there are more surprises there: an empty tomb and Mary supposes that someone has stolen the body. She is so bereft that she doesn't recognize Jesus until he calls her by name... and then she tries to hold him, to cling to him in some translations.

Had she known e.e. cummings' poem, she might have erupted with "i thank You God for most this amazing day..." except she hasn't got the amazing thing about the day quite right. "Don't cling to me," says Jesus, "because I'm still leaving." It sounds harsh, but it challenges us to refocus our attention on just what is most amazing about this day.

If we think about Mary's week, we might say, "I thank You God for most this amazing day..." in which joy and celebration were shared by the faith community as he entered Jerusalem. We might say, "I thank You God for most this amazing day..." in which Jesus set faith free from the religious authorities who had used it to bind up the people through dead laws. "I thank You God for most this amazing day..." in which news of a betrayer cannot undermine the love that holds the faith community together, the love that Jesus offers in that final meal. And even in death, in Jesus' death we can thank God for a love so deep.

And then today, we can hear Jesus saying “I who have died am alive again. But e.e. cummings didn’t say these words about Jesus. He said them about himself. This is why Mary should not cling to Jesus because this most amazing day is about her life, her new life as one who was dead and yet is now alive again. Christ is risen! ... But so are you.

Our story is not so different from Mary’s. I thank You God for most this amazing day because today joy belongs to the community of faith. We have cause to celebrate in those who continue to challenge religious and other authorities who use faith to build their own power. There are those who still believe that faith sets us free. We live in a day when the LGBTQ community is finding a place within the church, when people with broken marriages find support instead of judgment. According to Bill McKibben, we live in a day when there are more organizations networked on environmental issues than any other single issue. The church is finally learning to love the earth rather than using it up.

And here, even in the midst of struggles, we are seeing amazing days. Yes, a number of our people have been through surgeries, but through the work of surgeons and the care of nurses and the support of this community, they are healing. Amazing. Yes we have lost two beloved members, but you have responded to the needs and we are experiencing the reality that love does conquer death. “By this,” says Jesus, shall people know that you are my disciples, that you have love for one another.” Amazing. And through it all you have supported your pastors with encouraging words, taking on the practical tasks that need to happen, a quiet evening over food with friends. These are amazing gifts, born of the new life we have through Christ. For Jesus is clearly here, not as one we cling to, but as one who has come alive in us.

Let it be said of us as we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus, that our ears are awake and our eyes are open to our own resurrections, to a basic sense of gratitude for all that God continues to do among us.

i thank You God for most this amazing  
day: for the leaping greenly spirits of trees  
and a blue true dream of sky;and for everything  
which is natural which is infinite which is yes

(i who have died am alive again today,  
and this is the sun’s birthday;this is the birth  
day of life and of love and wings;and of the gay  
great happening illimitably earth)

how should tasting touching hearing seeing  
breathing any – lifted from the no  
of all nothing – human merely being  
doubt unimaginable you?

(now the ears of my ears awake and  
now the eyes of my eyes are opened)

*by e.e. cummings*

Amen.