

Easter 2017
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St. Matthew's Kellers Church
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Grace, mercy, and peace to you, from our Risen Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen!

My daughter does not consider herself a Christian, at this time. For a lot of reasons, relatively few of which have to do with the fact that both her father and I are pastors. Maybe none of her reasons have to do with us. Although she does believe strongly in the grace and love of God. And that God does not require us to do good works to love us. (Which makes her kind of a Lutheran agnostic ~ although she calls herself a “secular humanist.”) And she is very proud of us, and what we teach, and preach, and how we lead our congregations and live out our faith. But she chooses not to engage in any faith practices. Which brings up a lot of feelings in me: regret, disappointment; sometimes anger at how she has been treated by various Christians. Then I read a Facebook post from another pastor: “Sometimes you get to overhear a conversation that is so beautiful and true that it gives you words that meet your own needs. Some friends who aren't religious were talking about how when they are sickened and heartbroken over the state of the world, they sometimes catch themselves praying, even though they don't believe in God, and don't know what praying means for them. [One of them] suggested ‘sometimes you just want to know there's a heart bigger than yours that is breaking too.’”

As God's heart broke on Good Friday. And as God's heart broke in all the wars, violence, and abuse over the ages. As God's heart breaks when someone who committed no crime is executed. But I want to say to these non-Christians friends of my colleague: You are right. God's heart is bigger than ours. For our God loves not just the person executed after committing no crime; our God loves the person executed after committing a horrendous crime. Which is why I am grateful that God is God and I, for instance, am not. I believe in how important it is to love our enemies. And I believe that peace is God's desire not just for me, but for everyone in the world. But when I heard about the 59 bombs the United States dropped on that air base in Syria last week I was, at first, glad. When I learned those bombs did hardly any damage I found myself disappointed. I guess I wanted revenge for all those who died in the Syrian government's gas attacks. And I wanted the Syrians to not have the capability to do launch such gas attacks again. We humans are capable of having conflicting feelings at the same time. Including having feelings that conflict with our own ideals, our own values. Like not believing in God, but praying to God at the same time.

What really caught my imagination in our gospel for this Easter day was Matthew's description in verse 8 of the emotions Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were feeling after their conversation with the angel of the Lord; they left the tomb “with fear and great joy” – both emotions at the same time. Matthew doesn't tell us what the women were feeling as they approached ~ perhaps fear and grief ~ maybe some guilt ~ Matthew mentions only their feelings of fear and great joy as they left. The very next thing that happens is that Jesus shows up in person. He encourages the women. He allows them to embrace him ~ and worship him. Then the risen Jesus repeats the mission given to the women by the angel at the tomb: to tell the male disciples the news of his resurrection, and that they should meet him in Galilee.

The women came to the tomb expecting that Jesus' death would be the end. What else could it be? He died. They saw it. Death was all they expected when they went to his tomb. But, this time, death was not

the end. What followed death was not grief – but life. God doing a new thing. Musician Carrie Newcomer writes and sings that we live between the ache and the awe. As the women were in those moments: living between the ache and the awe. But Jesus doesn't leave them in their jumble of emotions. Jesus has given the women who witnessed his resurrection something to do. A mission that involves sharing a strange hope. A new trust. Death is not the end of Jesus's story and it is not the end of Mary Magdalene and the other Mary's story.

Even death that breaks God's heart is not the end. (And on my best days, I believe that every death breaks God's heart, for God knows how precious life is.) God has written a new ending to our human story. God, the creator who brought us avocados and nebulae, bouncy balls and water molecules, puppies and coffee, our Creator God has imagined a life beyond the death that is the inevitable end of our human life. God has not only imagined a life beyond death – God *made it so*. And God made it good. The women hurried away from the empty tomb that day with a strange hope and a new trust: because they had witnessed life when they expected death. God was writing a new end to their story.

Death is not the end of our story, either. Oh, we will all die. This body will end. But our God has something for us after death. A new life. We live between the ache and the awe, as Carrie Newcomer sings. Between grief and trust. God's broken heart at Jesus' death moved God to a new creation: resurrection. The resurrection of Jesus reminds us that whenever we encounter something like a death, we had better start looking for resurrection. Because God has imagined a new life for us ~ God has imagined a new life for our whole broken world. Jesus' resurrection means the story is never over. Alleluia! Amen