

"Run With It"

Sermon on Easter Sunday, April 17, 2022

Joanna, Mary, Magdalene, Mary and others. It could have been Jamie, Linda, and Maryann. It could have been Rebecca, Diana... The truth is: the first all-female committee of church history was assembled in the early dawn hours of Easter morning and that committee addressed the man-made depression about lagging faith and hope. True, the women were not confident enough yet to shout "He is risen." They were not sure yet how to interpret the first signs of a new morning, an empty tomb and no body of evidence, nothing to show for... But then, people who set out to find God in our world usually don't come across irrefutable evidence that would overturn the arguments of skeptics and agnostics or quickly comfort disheartened souls, broken by this world's cruelties. Instead, what we find when we join the path of Mary Magdalene and the others in this world of ours, are often signs of something that is amiss. And ironically, it's the first sign of God! We may come across emptiness underneath the professional veneer of a day at work; emptiness in the midst of constant human activity; emptiness even in religious practices sometimes. We may come across strange people speaking to us in mysterious words, the mystics who point at a deeper secret. And like Joanna and Mary and the other unnamed women, we are left to wonder what to make of it all. Is God really present in this world, this planet, this universe, your life?

We open our ears. We listen. From the eastern horizon we hear shouts of war and atrocities. From the northern horizon we hear the cracking of the Greenland ice sheet. From the west, we hear of droughts and wild fires. From the southern hemisphere we hear of tremendous poverty. Doesn't it seem at times that we don't have much reason or evidence to believe in a resurrection? All that we find in this world when we look for God is an empty tomb - or so it seems.

Easter morning begins in the fog of fear and uncertainty. Neither the women who went to the tomb to embalm the body of Jesus, nor the men who were hiding for fear of being arraigned and killed, have a clear idea of what's happening and what the future may hold.

We are very much in the same boat with them in this year 2022, in a world that faces innumerable challenges. The question is: will we return from the emptiness and call it quits or will we take the tender signs of awakening, seen and heard in the fog of Easter morning, and run with hope? That's what Mary Magdalene did. That's what the women did. They took what God gave them and carried the tender seeds of hope in their hearts, no matter what the cold world would tell them in reply, no matter the percentage of likelihood, no matter the female bashing to be expected. People of faith see little signs of hope where most other people only see an empty tomb. And they run with it!

Some people have suggested that faith may be our way of holding on to illusions, our attempt to run away from the disturbing realities of the world. But the opposite is true. Christians first look at the crucified Jesus and then they direct their eyes to an empty tomb. We are under no illusions. We see clearly that not everything is taken care of for us by some fairy tale God who magically takes away our suffering and any inconveniences. We are under no illusions. We stare at the cross, we glance into the empty tomb, we hear stories of great suffering and we know what loss feels like. We are under no illusions. Yet we also know that an invisible hand and a loving spirit moves this mysterious world of ours. And we take what God gives us... hints of hope, traces of the resurrection, the undisputable reality of a new sunrise, and we run with it.

It was early in the morning when the women arrived; it was as dark as we experience the world sometimes. I cannot repeat enough what I believe with all of my heart: instead of cynicism and defeatism, we need to take the signs of hope given to us wherever we find them and run with it. And we need to have the courage to look the darkness in the eye, not running away from it. If you have some bad prognosis in your life, some loss or upcoming surgery, disappointing news from friends or family, look it in the eye, enter the empty tomb and stay there for a little while. Look around you. Listen and open your antennas. There is more there than what meets the eye. Open your heart and soul to God's presence and the signs he sends your way, and run with it.

It was early in the morning when the women arrived, still dark, and the task they came to perform was not a joyful one. They brought spices and they were ready to bring closure to something that really can't be fully closed: the loss of a loved one. Part of the darkness they experienced was grief, a feeling of heaviness. When people experience that, they are full of the wildest feelings at one time and totally devoid of feelings, numb, at another time. They are in the sacred state of grieving. But I tell you, these women teach us to be alert and watch out for the signs of life God is sending our way, even when things feel numb. Death cannot choke life. The night cannot swallow the day. And we, people of Easter, are encouraged to look for signs of God's presence in the midst of life's difficult moments. God is there. Christ is there. Signs of his presence are there. In this world that is crying out for a new generation of faith, let us run with what God gives us. Before long, we will know, we will see - the risen Christ, Easter, HOPE, FAITH, LOVE. It's not empty. It fills us. **Amen.**