

Marjory Zoet Bankson: Resurrection!

Easter Sunday: April 23, 2000

A Sermon for Seekers Church

By Marjory Zoet Bankson

Resurrection!

Text: John 20:1-18

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. ... Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and said to him, "Teacher!" And then he said to her, "Do not hold onto me, but go and tell my disciples that I am ascending to my Father and your Father."

The yards and hillsides of our neighborhood fairly **shout** an Easter chorus with colors that do not match— but testify to the profligate creativity of God. It may not last long, but the show is fabulous! Just imagine inventing the palette painted by azaleas all over this city!

Easter **is** a celebration of nature's cycle.

Easter is a date set by the moon – the first Sunday after the first full moon on or after the Spring Equinox. Eggs, bunnies and too much sweetness seem natural in this season of riotous bursting-forth. Like ancient pagans, we begin to stretch our limbs and reach toward the sun after long, cramped winter deadness.

However, Easter is more than nature's yearly cycle of rebirth. We sing of Resurrection – and wonder what it means for us.

A pastor from Olathe, Kansas, wrote in Living Pulpit:

All aspects of our faith are easier when they do not change. Indeed, the message of the cross is clearest when we observe Jesus, nailed and immobile. Ibe becomes complex when Jesus comes out of the tomb, on the loose, with places to go.

(W.J. Sappenfield, Living Pulpit Apr-Jun 2000)

Easter walks hand-in-hand with the Jewish celebration of Passover.

Moreover, although there is no tradition of an afterlife in Jewish scriptures, there is the yearly Passover feast of remembrance that Jesus celebrated with his disciples on the night of his betrayal – of how God called them out of Egypt as the first-born Egyptians lay dying. Life out of death.

The Resurrection of a people.

So the followers of Jesus had the tradition of Passover in their hearts

as they tried to express the sense that God was still present to them in a powerful way after Jesus died.

When [Mary Magdalene](#) came to the tomb before dawn, she expected only death.

No Passover angel had marked the lintel of his cross to spare his life.

Nevertheless, she encountered someone there – a word – her name – called her to life again.

Like Mary, we are realists.

We know what death does to living things.

We know that bodies rot and losses last.

We trust that spring will come each year, but do not count on resurrection

in the graveyards scattered thru our lives.

On Thursday, when we gathered here for our last foot washing service in this building, I too was caught by the "shadow of

death." I could not stop my tears nor did I want to. It was unbearably tender to watch Manning struggle to wash his granddaughter's feet. Wondrous to watch Brenda trace a cross on her daughter's arch. Amazing to hold Mary Carol's fine bones in my hands as I remembered the many ways we have walked together here.

And today, our last Easter breakfast in this place, I want to honor Jane Lieper's vision for bringing us together around a celebratory meal, recall the table linens that she brought from home and remember the times that her daughter, Margie, and her adopted grand-daughter, Iyat, were here from Cambodia or New York. We spread our table wide on those feast days.

Eating together has been woven through this community at the School of Christian Living, at Dayspring and Wellspring, and in countless smaller gatherings around somebody's dinner table. **Each time, we watch for that mystic spark – like the quickening of life that Mary felt when she heard her name called– and notice how love can leap across the divide between "you" and "me" to make us something more than either one could be alone.**

Such communion can be a moment of Resurrection.

God's Story

Paul's letter to the Corinthians (which we also read this week) contains the first account of Jesus' Resurrection. Written before any of the Gospels, about 25 years after the event, he simply says

...hold firmly to the message I proclaimed...that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas and then to the twelve.

No stone to roll away. No angels. No encounter in the garden. Nothing dramatic or glamorous. For Paul, the Risen Christ was not so much about the physical person of Jesus as it was about hope. What Passover was for a people, Resurrection was for individual believers.

Paul interpreted Resurrection thru the lens of the prophets because it had meaning for his audience and for him. He names a list of those to whom the Christ appeared.

Then Paul says, "*Last of all, to one untimely born, he appeared to me.*"

We know something of that story. A voice heard only by Paul. A blinding light. Knocked off his horse. A sudden realization of being on the wrong path. Terrible guilt. And grace.

Then a long life on the road to spread the news that **all** are included in God's creation story.

For Paul, the Resurrection was a miraculous encounter with Divine Love,

– out of season – unexpected – even unwanted.

It threw his life into chaos.

Turned him around.

It was a revelation and new call.

Resurrection is not so much about what happened to the body of Jesus

as it is about what happens in our bodies when we open ourselves to God.

Resurrection quickens the heart when hope has dimmed and love has died.

The Gospel writers each had a different way of describing Resurrection. In Robin Griffith-Jones new book, The Four Witnesses, each Gospel writer shapes the narrative of Resurrection to express a sense of God's ongoing presence after Jesus' death.

- Mark, the Rebel who wrote a decade after Paul, leaves an

open-ended invitation for us to claim our own discipleship "on the road." as the embodiment of Resurrection.

- Matthew, the Jewish Rabbi who wrote his account maybe 50 years after Jesus' death, ends his story with the words "And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." It was clearly a promise of spiritual companionship.
- In Luke, whom Griffith-Jones calls "the Chronicler," Jesus appears to a couple on the road to Emmaus...and disappears just as they recognize him—ghostly but compelling.
- And John, the Mystic and Poet, who wrote nearly a century after Jesus walked the earth, had an even larger perspective – from the beginning of time. The encounter with Mary Magdalene, paints the Resurrection in brilliant tones.

Her shriveled heart quickens.

Life returns to **her** body.

It is not so much about Jesus as it is about her **call!**

Instead of bringing flowers in full bloom to symbolize Easter morning, I would bring the swollen stems of tulips after all the petals drop – a sign of seed, fertilized and full of potential, but not yet ready for planting. That is the image of Resurrection for me this year.

My Story

My own experience is partial at best, but I know what revelation feels like.

Last October, on the Seekers overnight, the women gathered to honor my 60th birthday. That was the beginning of a critical turning point for me, although I did not know it then.

There were five women who had lived into the decade of their sixties...and they each had a "wisdom story" for me. In essence,

they said that the seventh decade would be about

- Loss of work identity;
- a shift in physical abilities;
- discovering a deeper spirituality.

It scared me a little. I could feel the cold breath of diminishment in their words and Easter seemed far away. Then we turned our attention to Carroll Street and I forgot about it- sort of.

Last month, I met with the Faith at Work Executive Committee, down in Florida. It is a new group, all considerably younger than I am. I made a chance remark about becoming an unpaid "staff associate" when I was ready to retire and then the query came: "Do you have a timetable?"

Everything stopped. I went inside. The image I saw there was the biannual Convocation-an expanded Board meeting that we have every other year. It will be next April, at Eastertide. I was handing a symbol of my office to someone else. That is what I said. It was as much a surprise to me as to them.

A revelation!

Close to what Mary Magdalene might have felt when she heard Jesus call her by name.

Together we drew a deep breath – and began planning for the transition. Our Board meeting two weeks ago felt like a "last supper" together. We worked and laughed and wept and worshiped

–
disciples "on the way."

Like Mary Magdalene, I am being called to let go of what I have loved and poured my life energy into for the past 15 years. Those of you who have read [*Call to the Soul*](#) will recognize that we had just stepped into Stage Six – Release.

I sense a new call coming – to write, to offer some guidance or spiritual companionship, pay more attention to our home

life and make space for my creativity to come again.

On the surface, things are going well.

However, underneath, I notice that I am feeling vulnerable and afraid. I completely forgot an important appointment. Last Sunday, I left my keys hanging in the car door behind the church. On Good Friday, I locked my keys inside the office and had to call my assistant for rescue. In my dreams, I cannot find my shoes.

At this point, I cannot imagine what Resurrection will look like – but I know the story of Mary Magdalene's encounter with Christ in the Garden and it will have to be enough.

That and this community.

Our Story

Resurrection is the promise of God's presence as we release one call and reach for the next.

The last time I preached, I spoke about the generational transition going on in Seekers.

Not only will Sonya and Manning be moving next August, but also the move to Takoma will begin a pruning process that will gradually change the face of Seekers.

Each of us will be challenged to go deeper, experience the death and resurrection of Christ in our life as a community of people called by God to a work we do not know yet.

Can we be faithful to the journey with Jesus that has taken us to this point?

Can we trust in Resurrection?

Last week, [Kate preached](#) about the woman who anointed Jesus' feet with an extravagant gift of nard, poured out with love and gratitude for a connection made offstage. When Judas complained that it could have been sold and the money given to the poor, Jesus stopped him saying, "She has done a beautiful

thing. She has anointed my body for burial."

In other words, there is a time to keep the lid on... and a time to pour it out.

Then Jesus said, " And what she has done will be told in memory of her."

(**not** in memory of me but in memory of her).

It was an invitation to extravagant gratitude.

Moreover, I believe it is an invitation to us as we think about financing our ministry at Carroll Street.

Last week, Kate passed out "stewardship reflection" sheets.

This week they will be on the piano after the service.

I invite you to take one and begin to work with the "alabaster jar" in your possession.

- Consider a no-interest loan for five years.
- Alternatively, consider a percentage increase in your weekly or your monthly giving.
- Or consider a percentage bequest in your will.

Maybe it is your relationship with money that needs an experience of Resurrection.

I know that one of the fears I have about releasing my position at Faith@Work is the shift to having no income and no work identity.

What will I have to give?

Do I dare to look at my wealth in a bigger way?

As a family, how can we open ourselves to God?

Break our addiction to what we "ought" to expect?

These are the questions I bring to the tomb,
trusting in God's power to meet us there,
believing in **resurrection!**

Amen