

And

A Sermon for Pilgrim Congregational Church, UCC, Lexington

April 9, 2023 - Easter Sunday

Rev. Reebee Kavich Girash

Scripture Readings:

Responsive Reading: Psalm 118

God is good! All the time!

All the time! God is good!

O give thanks to the LORD, for God is good;

God's steadfast love endures forever!

God is our strength and our might

God has become our salvation!

We thank you, God, that you have answered us, and have become our salvation.

The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.

This is God's doing and it is marvelous in our eyes.

This is the day that God has made: let us rejoice and be glad in it!

Matthew 28:1-10

After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. ²And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. ⁴For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. ⁵But the angel said to the women, 'Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. ⁶He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. ⁷Then go quickly and tell his disciples, "He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him." This is my message for you.' ⁸So they left the tomb quickly with fear

and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹Suddenly Jesus met them and said, 'Greetings!' And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshipped him. ¹⁰Then Jesus said to them, 'Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.'

Prayer

Sermon

Good morning everyone. For our grammar lesson today, I'd like to focus on conjunctions.

Some of you are thinking that you're going to pull my family aside later to check on me, I must be more tired than you thought - but not to worry. If some of you thought you were here for worship, not a Language Arts class, I do apologize. There may yet be more singing - however, right now, I'm going to grab some chalk and a chalkboard and diagram the sentences in our Gospel Reading.

Maybe I'll skip the chalkboard, but conjunctions are important, I assure you. In some of the Easter texts, the whole concept hinges on the word "but," for as Karl Barth said, "The gospel is not a natural therefore, but a miraculous nevertheless."

This morning's text, I contend, depends on the word AND.

That's *kai* in the Greek - and, also, both, even.

So they left the tomb quickly with fear AND great joy, and ran to tell Jesus' disciples.

The women had both fear and joy.

Binaries are habitual, right? The situation is either terrible or wonderful. We are either this or that. We put people in well defined categories. But there

sure are a lot of false dichotomies in our world - we'd be better off speaking of spectrums, of nuances, of AND. The magnificent AND which defies the binary, which gives space AND grace to the complex. And it's the AND of Easter morning that I invite you into today.

The women were fearful AND joyful.

They went to the tomb mourning AND expectant.

They were brave AND grieving.

—

I'm thinking of a foster dad, Jack, sitting in the bleachers, watching his foster son's final high school game. How hard this young man had worked and how far he had come. Tears in his eyes, Jack watched, anxious and proud, grateful and sad, excited and blessed,

AND.

I'm thinking of a Friday, one Holy Week a decade ago. I was walking with a member of my congregation to go to our local ecumenical service. As we started walking she broke the news: her father had died suddenly that very morning. We talked about the grief and the shock and I wondered aloud how she could go to church so soon. Joanne preached the magnificent AND of Easter to me that day and I remember her exact words: "I am not afraid to say, Jesus is my savior."

AND

The AND, for Joanne rose up out of the promise from our Psalm this morning - that in all moments, wonderful and terrible,

God's steadfast love endures forever!

And I'm thinking about Mary Magdalene and the other Mary.

So they left the tomb quickly with fear AND great joy...

When we got to this verse in Bible study this week - the Marys running with fear AND great joy, some of us immediately thought of the Psalms - poetry of the great AND. So often one word just doesn't get the point across. There's a common phrase,

Fear of the LORD is where wisdom begins (111:10)

but fear doesn't get the Hebrew across, really - it's not just fear - it's awe, it's respect and it's reverence.

And sure enough in our Gospel: *they went with fear AND great joy...* in the Greek, fear is just as nuanced. Fear, and reverence. The women, that first Easter morning, came to the tomb traumatized and expectant, and they left with fear and reverence and joy - all together.

What I am saying is that you don't have to be one thing or the other - fit into one category - have one emotion or the other - have one experience or its opposite - to be faithful this Easter morning.

We get the great ANDs right from Jesus:

He was tender AND prophetic

He was friend AND teacher

Healer AND savior

In his last days, he was mournful AND he was determined.

He died - the worst, most tragic, most terrible thing

There was nothing good on Friday

He died at the hands of the ancient domination system

AND on the third day

AND on the third day.....he rose.

We see the magnificent AND from the women in our story,

From Mary Magdalene AND the other Mary.

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

They were. They were there.

They were there at the foot of the cross

When the earth shook

Matthew 27 says, “55 Many women - Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and others - were there at the cross; they had followed Jesus from Galilee and had provided for him (*Diakoneo - they ministered to him - to draw on our Lenten theme, they cared for him*). They were there.

AND

Were you there when he rose up from the tomb?

They were. They were there.

They were there

At the empty tomb

When the earth shook.

“After the sabbath,

as the first day of the week was dawning,

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb.

²And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it....”

The angel said, “go quickly and tell his disciples, “He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.””

AND they did.

Mary Magdalene AND the other Mary

Went out fearful AND joyful

In awe

AND ready to preach resurrection.

The angel - and the risen Christ - told them not to be afraid. I think what that means is: don't let your fear keep you at the tomb. The message must have gotten through because they went out with fear AND great joy - AND ready to say: Love is stronger than death!

I wonder if this magnificent AND can be ours, too. We might be in the worst of times, AND rise on Easter morning. We can experience both grief AND hope, trauma AND healing. To shout hallelujah on Easter does not deny our tears at the foot of the cross. To rise up does not deny we have been on our knees.

AND.

We have seen the worst, AND we are looking for something better.

We have hit setbacks AND we are determined.

We are grieving AND we are grateful.

We are doubtful AND we are convinced.

We are discouraged AND we are brave.

We are tired AND we are ready.

We are heartbroken AND we are full of love.

We are weakened AND we are strong.

Boulders have appeared in our path AND we are undaunted.

We have come to mourn AND we have come to dance.

The world is marked by terror,

AND

there is hope.

The world is marked by terror,

AND

We proclaim that there is hope.

He was buried in a borrowed tomb

AND

He rose to give us all new life

AND

His story is not over

AND

AND

AND

our story is not over.

The worst thing is never the last thing. (Frederick Buechner)

Can I get an AND?

AND.

One more time.

AND.

AND Christ is Risen -

AND Christ is Risen Indeed.

Hallelujah!

AND

Amen.