

I speak to you in the name of God, Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. Amen.

Alleluia! It's so nice to say that this morning! Say it with me: Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

Today I'm giving thanks for many things. The resurrection of our Lord and Savior is at the top of the list, of course, but I'm also thankful for this warm spring day, and for Chris Alexander who repaired our air conditioner so we can worship in comfort today. I'm thankful for so many of you who have given your time, talent, and presence to our Holy Week services, and for all of you here today, as well. I'm thankful for the ecumenical community of faith that worships here on Good Friday, in a style that is unfamiliar to many of those who come. And I'm especially thankful for Holy Week, for the prayers and liturgies of those days that allow us to understand just a tiny bit of what our Savior endured at the end of his earthly life.

Some of the prayers from Good Friday have planted themselves in my heart. They are words for us to pray every day, even on this day of great celebration—prayers for our nation, for our world, and for the universal church of Christ; for all to see that things that were cast down are being raised up and things which had grown old are being made new; and for the true love of peace to grow in every heart. It's up to us not only to pray for those things, but also to believe that through the power of Christ they *will* come to be.

Not unlike the story of the birth of the Christ child, the story of his passion, crucifixion and resurrection is at least vaguely familiar to many, certainly to those who gather on Easter morning to remember and give thanks for the benefits and blessings we've received on account of what happened to our Lord. The challenge for a preacher on this day is how to speak this ancient, sacred truth in a way that is new, fresh, and compelling, so that Easter doesn't become a day that's just part of the church year, just an occasion for family gatherings, new clothes, and Easter egg hunts, and certainly not just a day for us to enjoy, then put aside, until it comes around next year—which by the way will be on April first. As one of my St. Francis sisters remarked when I mentioned this challenge, "the Easter bunny did not hop out of the tomb when the stone was rolled away!" There's nothing "cute" about the events of Easter; but there *is* much for us to ponder in our hearts, just as Mary pondered all that took place at the birth of her son.

I'm pleased that Mary Magdalene has such a large role in telling the Easter story, not only because she's a woman, but because it's easier for me, as a woman, to imagine what she was feeling that day. Many of us have been taught that she was a prostitute, although there is no evidence that is true. She was a devoted follower of Jesus, whom she considered to be her friend and Lord. She had witnessed everything that happened before, from Jesus' triumphant entrance into Jerusalem, through his pain and suffering, and finally his death. We can only imagine her despair. John's account of this day doesn't tell us *why* she got up early and went to the tomb; perhaps she didn't know why herself. Maybe it was because she was too grief-stricken to sleep; maybe she wanted to be close to Jesus, as we want to be close to our loved ones when we visit the place where they have been laid to rest.

Mary must have been shocked and afraid to find the stone had been moved—she didn't take time to look inside, but instead ran to tell Peter and the other disciple, who immediately took off running, hard, as if they were in a race to see who could get there first. The other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, broke away from Peter, and seeing that the stone had been moved, just as Mary Magdalene said, he bent down and looked into the tomb. When Peter arrived, he didn't just look, he went into the tomb; and soon the other disciple joined him. Neither of them saw the Lord, but the gospel tells us the Beloved Disciple believed. He might not have understood, but he did believe, and

that reminds us that faith does not require understanding; understanding comes *through* faith, as a gift of the Holy Spirit.

After the two disciples left the tomb, Mary Magdalene stayed there, weeping. From our own experience we know that she simply didn't know what else to do. Finally she bent down and looked into the tomb. The Beloved disciple had seen the wrappings left there; so had Peter, and *he* also saw the cloth that had been on Jesus' head. But Mary Magdalene saw angels; and behind her the man she supposed to be the gardener. How could she have known it was really Jesus? How can *we* know it is Jesus when he comes to us as one of those he has taught us to serve in his name, or when we receive the bread and wine of the Eucharist, or in circumstances that could only be explained by his presence? For Mary, recognition came not in seeing, but in hearing the voice of her friend and teacher speaking her name. We're reminded of Jesus' words in John 10:27, "My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me." So it was for Mary Magdalene. After speaking with him on that Easter day, she left him, taking with her a story to tell, and she told it eagerly. "I have seen the Lord."

In the Passion narrative we heard on Good Friday, John writes about the crucifixion, "he who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth." Yet as far as we know, *no one* saw the Resurrection; there is no proof that it happened, only the accounts of human beings who believed they saw and spoke with Jesus after he died. In our day of advanced technology and scientific discovery, we like proof, don't we! Without it, we're left with three questions to ponder as we consider the Resurrection of Jesus Christ: Do I believe it's true? Surely our answer is yes, because we are here today. So we must ask ourselves what difference does it make in my life? And what am I to do about it? Those are deeply spiritual, deeply personal questions that each of us can answer only for ourselves. Our presence here today does give us a running start, just as it did those disciples. Maybe it will help us if we remember that the faith of the earliest Christians didn't grow from proof, or even from argument. They had no way of proving or disproving what was told to them about the mystery we're celebrating today. Like us, each of them had to decide for himself.

In his book, "*Our Greatest Gift: A Meditation on Dying and Caring*," Henri Nouwen writes, "The resurrection of Jesus is a hidden event. Jesus didn't rise from the dead to prove to those who had crucified him that they had made a mistake, or to confound his opponents. Nor did he rise to impress the rulers of his time or to force anyone to believe. Jesus' resurrection was the full affirmation of his Father's love. Therefore, he only showed himself to those who knew about this love."

We are here today because we know this love. We know about it through the forgiveness of our sins; in the hope that gets us through the most difficult situations; and in the knowledge that no matter what happens to us, God will be with us. Most of all, we know it through our Lord Jesus Christ. God's love created us, redeemed us, and sustains us. God's love wins. Then. Now. Always. Forever.

*Amen.*