

April 4, 2021
Easter Sunday

“What Did You Expect?”
Sermon by Rev. Susan Drake

Scripture Readings

Isaiah 57:14-15

*And it shall be said,
“Build up, build up, prepare the way,
remove every obstruction from my people's way.”
For thus says the One who is high and lifted up,
who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy:
“I dwell in the high and holy place,
and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit,
to revive the spirit of the lowly,
and to revive the heart of the contrite.*

Mark 16:1-8

When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. They had been saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?” When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, “Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.” So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

Message “What Did You Expect?”

Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome were hurting, Oh Lord their hearts were heavy with the pain of loss. They were grieving the death of our Lord but they got up and did what needed doing anyway. His body needed anointing, Jesus needed to be shown the honor and respect he deserved.

I want to mention now that they already knew where they were going, where Jesus’s body had been placed because they had stayed through all the gruesome and horrific events leading up to Jesus’s death. They stayed. Weeping, crying, beating their chests in horror, rending their clothes, they had stayed with Jesus until they laid him in the tomb.

Most of my life I heard theologians often go on about how Jesus was abandoned in his final days, denied and betrayed in his final days but not by the women that loved him.

So they knew how to get where they were going but they were still worried, still talking it over, wringing their hands, “what will we do when we get there, who will roll the stone away” that stone they had seen placed in front of the grave.

What they expect is an obstacle, what they expect is that they won't be able to do what needs doing but they keep going anyway, in spite of their fears. When we make plans, we can not leave God out of the equation.

Mark Twain once said, “I've had a lot of worries in my life, most of which never happened.” All their fears were for nothing because the stone had already been rolled away.

There is such an important lesson for us in their actions. They went, afraid, not knowing what they would do when they got there but they kept going anyway, one foot and another foot, unsure, lacking confidence with heavy hearts, they kept going, hoping somehow they would be able to do what they set out to do.

When you think there is going to be an obstacle, keep going anyway. When you expect the worst, just keep going. When your heart is so full of ache and grief, just keep going. Keep doing what you think you are supposed to be doing, keep moving toward your goal and invite God into the process and there is no telling what will happen.

Don't let limiting thoughts and low expectations keep you from moving forward. You have heard me say it before, what God wants is to be in a relationship with you, not just someone you reach out to like a panic button when you're in trouble. God desires to be included in your plans, He desires for you to lean on and trust and talk with God in all times and places.

What dreams do you have that you aren't moving forward because you have let your finite, human thinking tell you that it won't work, that it's impossible, or you're too old? What if Mary and Mary and Salome had just thought to themselves “We might as well not go because we know the rock will be in the way. Would the gospel ever be spoken? The good news ever proclaimed? What keeps you from doing what you think you are supposed to be doing, what God is calling you to do?

Did everybody get one? I want you to write down privately, what your obstacle is. what stands in your way of God's dream for you. What fears keep you stationary? What do you need God's help to move so you can move forward.

Go ahead and take a minute to do that and when you are done fold it up and we are going to put it inside of this boulder on the way out of church as a symbolic gesture of putting this obstacle into God's hands.

I remember hearing once that God gives you the desires of your heart or God changes those desires if you let God have your life, if you have turned it all over to God.

It is not lost on me that even as we celebrate the good news today we also mark the 53rd anniversary of Rev. Dr. King's Assassination on April 3, 1968. And we are embroiled in yet another trial of another murder in which the verdict could set off a wave of violence no matter which way it goes because we are a nation that remains so precariously divided.

We have so much potential as a people, a community, and a nation if we could do the Godly work on healing those divides. But sometimes all I can see are the obstacles, the obstinance, selfishness, and denial. The notion that this nation could ever live into its ideals of freedom and equality for all feels so far away from where we are now. The obstacles, too massive.

But if we just keep moving forward tethered ever so slightly to God as we move toward that goal then we can be a part of that healing.

This gospel story speaks to me, that even though I'm afraid, even though I can be shortsighted, all I have to do is keep moving forward, even when I get so afraid that I'm dizzy with the fear, I keep moving forward, when we are sick of isolation and hopeless with grief, we just keep moving forward.

Keep inviting God into the conversations, into our thoughts, our hearts, our fears, and keep moving, one inch then the next and then when we get to our destination so often the thing that we fear is gone.

The stone has been rolled away and there we stand before the empty tomb. But even in that darkness and emptiness we find hope and promise. In the darkness and the emptiness there is room for God to fill up with what God chooses for us and God always has a bigger imagination than we do. And even in the darkness and emptiness, love rises, always, love rises, just keep moving forward. AMEN

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