

Here at Skyland Community Church we traditionally shield ourselves from Good Friday and Holy Saturday and jump directly from Maundy Thursday to Easter. Let me remind you what the disciples, including several women, experienced within just a few days, because it puts their experience and our own experience of Easter morning, especially this year, in context.

- First, Jesus is crucified on Good Friday, as an act of state sponsored terrorism. History tells us that Jesus was but one of hundreds crucified, to prevent the poor people from rebelling. Jesus died almost alone, as most of his disciples slipped away in the crowds, before they could be identified. Church tradition tells us that Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of Jesus, and other women were the last to leave.
- Next they experienced the horrible emptiness of Holy Saturday; a day of shock, loss, and mourning; a time for deep reassessment. Some have said that we have been and will continue to experience Holy Saturday’s anxieties and fears until things get “back to normal.”
- A week and a half ago that I led a group through a teaching and meditation gathering focused on the topic of fear, including techniques for confronting fears and coming to terms them. In doing so, I drew upon the wisdom of Jesus, Thich Nhat Hanh, and Tara Brach. Let me know separately if you think this might be helpful for our community as well.
- One of the things I did yesterday, on Holy Saturday was to allow myself to directly feel the grief and anxiety that has intruded intermittently into my consciousness for the past few weeks. I have the advantage of being very busy for most of my time, so my consciousness must stay focused on my work most of the day. But grief and anxiety reappear when I am quiet. As you all know, being busy is one coping strategy. But coping strategies can only help so much. Confronting fear directly, as Jesus tried to teach his disciples, is a much more productive way of adapting to scary times.
- I also spent some time on Holy Saturday reflecting on the ways in which I was grieving, not just for those experiencing unspeakable suffering around our country and the world, but also on a more personal level as well. When I reflected deeply, I realized that much of my grief concerned the temporary loss of privileges.

- To take a simple example, just think deeply about the privilege of being able to drive a car around the Bay Area. To take a simple example, just think deeply about the privilege of being able to drive a car around the Bay Area to come to the church, to visit parishioners, friends and family; the cost of an automobile, the costs of providing nonrenewable energy sources for most cars on the road, and the environmental impact of constructing roads out of concrete and asphalt. Then consider something as seemingly simple as the privilege of being able to buy groceries. Think deeply about the all the human costs involved in growing, harvesting, shipping, and bagging our groceries. Most of these costs are hidden from us; and we also choose not to dwell on them.

Perhaps for the first time in a century, we have a crystal-clear opportunity to reflect on our vast privileges and of our reliance on people of all nations. We are seeing directly, that their health and economic well-being directly affects our own. We are seeing in a much more painful way than ever before that we can only be as healthy as caregivers, public transit drivers, sanitation workers, grocery clerks, hotel staff, those who deliver goods to us, and so many others.

Parents and the companies for whom they work are seeing how critical our teachers and childcare providers are, not only for the services they provide but in terms of keeping themselves and our children healthy, in body, mind and spirit. This then, is the gift of Holy Saturday for us – an opportunity to pause, think deeply, and decide to move in a new direction. A new direction that recognizes the true value of what we receive from so many people. Having touched briefly on Good Friday and Holy Saturday, let hear the first portion of our Easter scripture reading, read by Gina Adams.

**Gina: The Resurrection of Jesus**

*After the Sabbath ended, at the first light of dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the Mary, the mother of James and Joseph, went to take a look at the tomb. Suddenly, the earth shook violently beneath their feet as the angel of God descended from heaven. Lightning flashed around him and his robe was dazzling white! The guards were stunned and terrified—lying motionless like dead men. Then the angel walked up to the tomb, rolled away the stone, and sat on top of it!*

Easter morning, the women go to take care of the body of Jesus, with great love but also great dread and fear. Can you imagine doing this? I can't. They are afraid of what they will find. Additionally, the tomb is guarded, so please understand that to care for Jesus is a dangerous, subversive political act. It is not just an act of love, it is an act of defiance of the Roman Empire. The women risk being captured as followers of a political and theological troublemaker. Remember that Peter denied being a follower of Jesus three times – yet these women dare to show up Easter morning.

They are there to clean his body, with great love and care and to dress it with spices. Suddenly they shocked by the appearance of the angel of God. The angel dramatically enters the scene, accompanied not only by an earthquake, but lightning! If it were a movie, this scene would demand special effects and dramatic music. The angel's appearance not only scares the two women but frightens the male guards so badly that they are frozen in place – they freeze in place like statues! Notice that unlike the men, the women are able to continue functioning. These were *strong* women, like so many of you.

When did the resurrection of Jesus begin? When does the resurrection begin in each of our lives? I remember walking beside San Francisco Bay by El Cerrito, in the East Bay, while I was still in seminary. Join me in imagining the scene. From the dog park at Point Isabel we can see the Golden Gate bridge in the distance. It is beautiful, but the Bay during a very low tide is not. When we look out into the Bay, all you can see is endless mud and old tires; **muck** as far as we can see it.

That is when we smell the stench of low tide at its fullest, when **all** is exposed, like when all that is dark or frightening is laid bare within our lives. That moment, when we have given up all hope, like the women at the tomb on the third day, like people in those places in the world where infection rates are soaring, is when the resurrection *begins*. The resurrection begins when we have resigned ourselves to despair – when we can least expect it – **that** is when God appears through other people – at our hour of greatest need.

- God appears as those who work tirelessly to save lives, putting their own lives at risk
- God appears, when we reach out and care for a hurting world.
- God appears as neighbors, checking in on each other; asking, “how are you? Not just physically but emotionally too.
- God appears when people pick up items from stores and deliver them to those who need to stay home for their own safety
- God appears as comfort. Comfort that arises in the midst of tears, as a beloved parent, spouse, or child, transitions from this life into eternal life with God.

The resurrection begins when we are *cried out, emptied out* and ready to *receive* this precious gift. That is the very moment when the resurrection begins.

***Gina:*** *The women were breathless and terrified, until the angel said to them, “There’s no reason to be afraid. I know you’re here looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He isn’t here—he has risen victoriously, just as he said! Come inside the tomb and see the place where our Lord was lying. Then run and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead! I give you his message: “I am going ahead of you in Galilee and you will see me there.”*

Let’s set aside our Sunday school image of a cool, calm, and collected Jesus benevolently saying, “Rejoice!” to women overwhelmed with joy. I believe Jesus was every bit as human as Mary and Mary and was just as shocked and excited to find himself alive as they were!

I believe that Jesus “came back”, not as a physical body, but as a fully conscious and *visible* manifestation of divine love. He doesn’t proclaim “rejoice” as something that *they* are supposed to do or feel. He shouts “rejoice” not just for the women, but for *himself*, and he does so with unfathomable gratitude to God. This wasn’t something that each of them was experiencing within their own skins – as separate islands of experience. No, their joy was totally interconnected.

Today that interconnected, transcendent joy is available to all people, of every faith, in all nations, today, *especially* when we are afraid. In Paul's letter to the Philippians he writes, "*make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Look not to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.*"

Our world is in need of this kind of transcendent joy right now, as we work *together* to restore the health of the world.

**Gina:** *So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them and said, 'Greetings!' And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshipped him. Then Jesus said to them, 'Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.'*

"Do not be afraid". Did you know that the opposite of love is not hate, it is fear? Sometimes when we are afraid, there's no room for love, especially love for others. For this reason, the words, "do not be afraid" are some of the most powerful words in both the Hebrew and Christian scriptures.

Do not be afraid, God says to Abraham, Hagar, Isaac, and Jacob. Fear not, God says to Moses, Joshua, Elijah, Joshua, and so many others.

"Do not be afraid", God says to separately to Mary and Joseph when Jesus is conceived by the Holy Spirit.

"Cast out all fears", Jesus says to his disciples, those he heals, and you and I today.

Why?

Because God has always been with those that open their hearts to God. Because Jesus is alive, resurrected from the dead each and every day we turn to him. Jesus casts out all fear because he loves us with the heart of God that beats within our own hearts this day. We are surrounded with the Good News of the resurrection. It calls us out into the world to proclaim, "Rejoice!" Make the love of Christ Jesus complete this day. Rejoice! Amen.

Pastoral Prayer  
Laura Kelly Fanucci

“When this is over,  
May we never again  
Take for granted  
A handshake with a stranger  
Full shelves at the store  
Conversations with neighbors  
A crowded theater  
Friday night out  
The taste of communion from a shared loaf and cup  
A routine checkup  
The school rush each morning  
Coffee with a friend  
The stadium roaring  
Each deep breath  
A boring Tuesday  
Life itself.  
When this ends,  
May we find  
That we have become  
More like the people  
We wanted to be  
We were called to be  
We hoped to be  
And may we stay  
That way-better  
For each other  
*Because of the worst.*”  
Amen.

<followed by prayer offered spontaneously>