

Healing as liberation
John 20.1-18

The Lord is risen! *He is risen indeed!*

These are such welcome words on Easter morning. After the long season of Lent, we are ready to celebrate that Jesus, though crucified, is alive.

We spent the last six weeks getting ready for today. Six long weeks of releasing...of confessing...of releasing...letting go...forgiving. Of course we're celebrating! With all that we have released...we feel a lightness of being...a liberation in our bodies. As we celebrate that Jesus is alive, we are also celebrating the healing that we are experiencing and the new life that is rising up in us.

Last week Mary talked about the pattern in the Gospel of Luke, that persons who encountered Jesus were released *from* something *to* something else:

- Released from power and privilege to repent and be free
- Released from the need to control to follow and be free
- Released from anxiety to trust and be free

As I've been thinking about this movement from release to freedom, from release to liberation, I started seeing *absence*. When I release my need to control, there is now an empty space, an absence. When we release things that have been binding and burdening us, the *absence* of that burden is liberating.

But the liberation isn't always immediate. *Absence* can be disorienting. We see this so very clearly in John's resurrection story. This story of resurrection is a story of *absence*, the absence of death. And it leaves Mary bewildered and frightened.

In all our joy and celebration this morning, we must see Mary. And the disciples. We must pay attention to their responses that morning. We dare not judge them failing to

understand or know that resurrection had happened, or for failing to recognize Jesus when he stood in front of them. The truth is, just like Mary and the disciples, we too are often so disoriented or upset or frustrated when confronted with *absence* that we too fail to recognize that resurrection is happening. We expect the liberation of resurrection to be immediate. But this story reminds us, each year, that it isn't.

In resurrection we are released *from* death *to* life. Jesus was released from death to life. But our eyes are so trained to see death, that it's hard to recognize anything else. In the absence of the stone sealing the tomb, Mary assumed someone had stolen Jesus' body. And when the disciples arrived and looked into the tomb, they saw linen wrappings. Jesus' body was absent, but they saw signs of death. But Mary, Mary stayed in the *absence*. Mary stayed in the garden, in the vacancy of not knowing, not understanding. She kept vigil. And finally, when she did look into the tomb, she saw two angels...God's messengers announcing life.

Even after seeing the angels, Mary still didn't recognize the resurrected Jesus. Not until he spoke her name. Finally, she too experienced the release from death to the liberation of aliveness.

But when she reached out to Jesus, he wouldn't let her hold onto him. And he told her he was leaving, going up to be with his Father/Mother God. In other words, he would be *absent* from her. It is only after Jesus tells Mary about his *absence* that she's free to leave the tomb and the garden and return to her friends, announcing, "I have seen the Lord!"

Resurrection is such a mystery. To live into the Good News of the resurrection, Mary had to release Jesus. Jesus had been released from the tomb and death *to* unbound and unlimited life and aliveness. And his resurrection, his release from death to life opened up...and keeps opening up...resurrection life and aliveness for Mary, for his disciples, for us.

May we, even as we're celebrating that Christ is risen, may we look for absence—the absence of death—and keep vigil in those places, waiting with expectant hope that new life will rise up...for...our God IS a living God!