

Sermon
Easter Sunday
March 31st, 2024
Church of the Ascension, Ottawa
The Reverend Victoria Scott
Readings: ACTS 10:34-43; PSALM 118:1-2, 14-24;
1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-11; MARK 16:1-8

There is a rhythm of resurrection. It's beating in us, and it's pulsing through all of creation.

Last Sunday, I invited you to notice the choreography of Holy Week, to be attentive to the rhythm and movement it offers us: a rhythm of death, burial and resurrection that we can let shape and guide us as we move through life. Our lives are a pattern and flow and rhythm of all the rhythms – the emotions – that Holy Week offers. Palm/Passion Sunday: a jubilant rhythm of celebration that becomes tinged with tension as things begin to go awry. Maundy Thursday: a pulse, a feeling of gathering in loving community in the midst of tension and turmoil; a rhythm of preparation – of preparing for what comes next – in foot washing and Eucharist. Good Friday: a rhythm of crisis, of anguish and sorrow. Holy Saturday: an absence of rhythm. A stillness. A waiting. And then, last night at the Vigil and this morning: an empty tomb and a realization that what looked like death was not death, not the end, but change and transformation. A realization that love is stronger than the violence that crushed Jesus and broke him. A realization that the heartbeat of God continues to beat. A realization that God is with us, always and forever. We repeat this pattern, this rhythm, throughout our lives: celebration, crisis, seeking comfort and connection in that crisis, sorrow, grief, the dawning realization that what looked like death was change and transformation. Holy Week, by having us experience it intentionally and intensely, helps us to notice and remember this rhythm in all our weeks.

This morning we are offered a resurrection account from Mark's Gospel. Last night we heard from John. Other years we hear from Matthew and Luke. In each of the accounts, it's not immediately clear what has happened. There is bewilderment. This morning we hear the women – Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome – have come to the tomb with spices. The stone has been rolled back. There is a young man in white and the women are alarmed. Can you imagine the swoosh of adrenaline, the thump-thump of their hearts? It's an unsettling rhythm! The young man tells them "...you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who

was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here". Terror and amazement seizes them and they are afraid. The rhythm of fear is unsteady, uneven. This is where Mark's Gospel ends. Mark ends with an empty tomb and a promise that Jesus has gone ahead to Galilee and that they would see him there just as he told them.

Rowan Williams says: "...the very untidiness of the Resurrection stories is one of the main reasons for taking them seriously. What's going on is clearly people struggling to find words for something they had not expected."

Imagine the women, leaving that empty tomb, their pulses racing. Imagine them walking and talking to one another, struggling to find words in their terror and amazement. This shows us that the rhythm of resurrection isn't immediately obvious. It takes time to come into step with the cadence of it. Imagine the women finding a steadiness as they expressed their terror and amazement to one another. A calmness as they walked and talked together. I don't believe they stayed silent. I believe they found the rhythm of resurrection, and they were able to walk the walk, and talk the talk.

This is an important reminder for us, on this Easter Day. Rhythms of conflict are relentless in our world today. How do we find the rhythm of resurrection, the rhythm of love, the heartbeat of God in the deafening rumble of conflict violence? On Good Friday, I spoke of a middle way between attachment and detachment, between fight and flight. This third – middle – way is not about balancing the opposites in our world – not about meeting violence with violence – but about holding it all, standing in the middle, neither fighting from a power position or fleeing in denial but holding both until new forms of life and healing emerge.¹

As many of you know, this time last year I had just returned from a pilgrimage to the Land of the Holy One. It is poignant and painful to recall this as rhythms of conflict and violence rage, and as there is so much suffering in this place where Jesus walked and talked, and suffered and died and was raised. When Bishop Shane was here in February, he shared Archbishop Hosam Naoum's plea that we, here in Canada, not create further division but that we continue to denounce violence and to pray for peace. This is a potent example of an opportunity for us to practice the middle way, and to be willing to hold the pain and suffering in the Land of the Holy One, and to trust that there is another way – the heartbeat of God beats there as it does in all of creation – there is a way, a way of love, and we pray for new life and healing in the Land of the Holy One.

¹ Adapted from <https://cac.org/daily-meditations/the-third-way-2016-06-28/>

I felt the tension, the rumbling of conflict, when we were in Jerusalem. I felt the range of rhythms and emotions that I have suggested are encapsulated in Holy Week. One of the last things we did in Jerusalem was to walk the Via Dolorosa and visit the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, which according to tradition dating back to the 4th century, contains the sites of Jesus's crucifixion and the tomb where he was buried. As I knelt at the site of the crucifixion, I felt that heavy rhythm I've talked about. A pulse of sorrow and grief. I had expected to feel this. What I felt at the site of the tomb, though, was unexpected! I thought I would feel similar grief and sadness there, but not so! What I felt, reverberating, was what we heard in our Gospel passage this morning: he is not here, for he has been raised. He has gone ahead to Galilee and you will see him there. We left Jerusalem and made our way to Galilee the very next day and we spent the remaining days of our pilgrimage there. The "he is not here" at the tomb was not absence, but rather a profound sense that Jesus was not in the tomb because in being raised, his presence saturates – pulses through – all of creation. His way – his rhythm of peace and love and connection – pulses all around us, inviting us to match that rhythm with our lives.

Christ is risen! This morning we remember an empty tomb and we celebrate that what looked like death was not death: it was change and transformation. We remember and celebrate that love is stronger than the violence that crushed Jesus and broke him. We remember – we feel – the steady and eternal pulse of the heartbeat of God that beats in us and through all of creation. We remember and celebrate that God is with us, always and forever.

There is a rhythm of resurrection. It's a pulse of love. It's a pulse of non-violent resistance. A pulse of peace. A pulse of healing. It's a steady pulse, inviting us to pause and find it when we're afraid and our pulses race, unsteady and erratic. Hear it, feel it in our song and prayer and sacrament this morning. Remember it as you go out into the world with all its counter rhythms, and move to that rhythm of God's love – that rhythm of resurrection – this day, and always. In Jesus name. Amen.