

Easter Day  
31/3/2024

Mark the Evangelist

Genesis 1:1-5  
John 20:1-18

### Disturbing the peace

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With the resurrection of Jesus, God disturbs the peace which is our uneasy compromise with death.

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Early, on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb.

Early. It's quiet, the early morning darkness, a quiet for quiet tasks: for thinking, for planning, for remembering, for tending to the dead. No matter how heart-rending it might be, death brings its own quiet and forces us to be still. *Requiem in pace*, we say to those who've died, Rest in peace, and quietness falls also on us who remain.

It had been a chaotic week for Mary and the other disciples, on top of all the movement, surprise, conflict, tension and misunderstanding of their tumultuous time with Jesus before that. The chaos now past, Mary's quiet morning reflects the clarity and closure of death's dismal order. Early in the morning, the fever of life is hushed.

But Mary approaches the tomb only to have her sad solitude shattered: "They have taken away my Lord...". Three times she declares, I don't know where he is. The tragic but reliable peace of death has been disturbed, and so also Mary's reconciliation with death. "They have taken him away...". Tell me where he is, and I'll gather him back and hold him, and at least I'll have again death's calm.

When Jesus died, the dream of a life of peace died with him, but there remained the reliability of the dead.

At least I know where he is.

At least I can remember him in the quiet of the morning.

No one can take *that* from me.

But he is *not* there.

Tell me where he is, and I will go and get him so that he can be properly dead again, so that he and I can have at least death's peace.

Sometimes, our compromise with death is pushed upon us – as for Mary, as for our own bereavements. Sometimes the compromise is the convenience of a death we *choose* to effect. If Mary had the calm after Jesus' death forced upon her, death's peace-by-crucifixion was chosen by Caiaphas and Pilate and the exclusive heavens they envisioned (see [the Good Friday sermon!](#)). This is death we *seek* as the means to some end, to some peace which requires that someone die. The peace we seek with distance and death is the quiet which comes when some onerous or terrible or dangerous thing is now past or put away. It is the dark peace which comes when the divorce papers are signed, when the life support is turned off, when the last of the evening's lingering guests leaves, when I've put my enemy in her grave, when I've done what I swore I would never do, or just when I turn off the news bulletins because it seems everything is going insane.

None of this is really peace, of course; it is chaos subdued, suppressed, but still chaotic. This peace is not the reconciliation of enemies but a cutting away of the other, more or less violently.

Into this suppressed chaos, Jesus appears alongside Mary. Her first instinct is to do what any of us would likely do: she reaches for him (“Teacher”, “Lord”, “Love”) to grasp, to hold, never to let him go again: I know again where you are, who you are, what you are.

But his reappearance is no mere return of the one Mary thinks she lost, though she doesn’t understand this yet. The resurrection is going to be the possibility of Mary herself being renewed, but it’s not this yet. At this point, it is only Jesus who is risen; Mary is a mere observer of his dying and rising, and his appearance is *outside* of her, does not yet envelop her. All she knows is that her dreams were dashed in the death of Jesus, and now they seem to be restored, and she grasps to hold tight the Jesus she thinks she knew.

But Jesus insists, Don’t hold on to me. Let me go. This is not what you think. It is not only that I am returned to you; it is also that you will be returned to God. But for this to happen, you must see me as I am; you must see God as God is. Let me ascend to God so that you can see my cross in God’s own heart. It is not merely death which is overcome. It is your resignation to death which is comprehended, your reconciliation to it, your use of death for your own ends, Mary, Peter, Caiaphas, Pilate. All of *this* is overcome.

The resurrection shatters death as peace, death as resolution, death as flight or abandonment, death as a means to some end.

This resurrection – the resurrection of the Crucified – is a challenge to our memory, a question to our account of what we did or felt or wanted.

This resurrection is the visitation of the present by the past – the *haunting* of the present by the past.

This resurrection tells a fuller story, not allowing certain things to be forgotten or hidden away, but bringing them uncomfortably into the light. For there are not a few histories we want to forget, or which have been forgotten for us, or which we would suppress if they again came to light.

This resurrection is revelation not of only God’s power but of the full extent of our need, of our incapacity to speak the truth, to bear it, to know what to do with it.

This resurrection is the dead refusing to take death “lying down” but rather disturbing death’s grim peace with a word of truth: you have come to terms with the empty and void ways of the world, and with the terrible depth of the darkness, and there is no life in this.

But in this resurrection, our victim returns to us, yet not with accusing finger. He speaks our name and brings the urgent, *hopeful* question: Mary! Peter! Caiaphas! Pilate! Do you see now? Do you see that God has overcome even all this? Do not grasp tightly what you thought you had to be; let yourself rather be grasped by my Father and my God, your Father and your God. Reach for that resurrection into a life which has put death’s power behind it.

God meets us early, in the morning quiet, after our dealings with death, to disturb the uneasy peace death brings.

But God comes not only early, not only in the dark stillness. God comes *on the first day of the week*.

And God finds the world – finds Mary and each one of us – as if we were *dead*,  
*entombed* in that early, mortal stillness – formless and void, buried deep, deep, deep in  
darkness.

And God says, let there be light.

Alleluia.

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