

Corinne: The Gospels tell three different accounts of the resurrection story, each with their own spin. Matthew's version is simple and powerful. As we read this story together, see where you imagine yourself as the events unfold. A reading from the gospel of Matthew, chapter 28, verses 1-10.

Matthew 28:1-10

After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men.

But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.' This is my message for you." 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 worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

May these words be to us our light and our life.
Thanks be go God.

Sermon Outline

1. Corinne - tell the story! Where are the women?

The women didn't know one another very well. But they knew the one who died intimately, each in her own way. As a dear friend. As a beloved teacher. As a son. After he died, they knew what to do. Each death is unique, but Jewish burial rituals are the same. Wrap the body in linen cloth. Entomb the body. Keep vigil. Watch and wait.

But it is impossible to keep vigil for three days and two nights without needing something to eat, a bit of rest. The women trust that the guard will keep the vigil for them while they try to shut their eyes for a few hours. Tend to their grief.

Two of the three Marys return at dawn after a fitful night, feeling guilty about their absence but grateful for the brief respite. On their walk, they make small talk. Comment on the beautiful sunrise. They expect to find the same tomb, the same stone in front of it, the same guard keeping watch. But instead, nothing is the way they expected it to be. The ground starts to shake under their feet. A bright light appears. The stone rolls away from the door to the tomb. The guards are shaking in their boots, too shocked to do anything about any of this. And, most terrifying of all, the tomb is empty.

The women look at one another and see pure fear in each other's eyes. Did they make this happen by leaving? Did someone steal the body? What were they going to do? What *could* they do?

But then, an angel says to them, "Do not be afraid." At the most terrifying moment of their lives, they receive a moment of reassurance, not that there is nothing to fear, but that they are not alone. God is with them. Joy is possible. Do not be afraid.

2. Adam - tell the story! Where are the disciples?

Afraid would be a good description of the disciples, as well. We might wonder, where were they that first Easter morning. Still asleep? Still awake after a grief filled night? Paralyzed by uncertainty and unable to know what to do next?

The last time we heard about the disciples in the Gospel of Matthew, they were in the Garden of Gethsemane. When their beloved teacher was betrayed before their eyes, and taken away like a criminal, they knew the threats were real. The valiant thing to do would be to fight. Jesus said no. The right thing to do would be to stand up and challenge the arrest. Jesus willingly goes. Could they be next? Fear turns to self-preservation and they all run for it. A little later, Peter is identified as a follower of Jesus. Immediately defensive, he quickly denies knowing Jesus--not once, but three times. Fear turns to denial and denial turns to grief, as Jesus is crucified.

Where did their grief and fear take them? The Gospel of Matthew doesn't say. But the Gospel of John provides an alternate ending to this first Easter day. John chapter 20 tells us that they were all together in someone's home, doors closed and locked to stay safe from the threats outside. Yet even here, terrified, alone and uncertain, Jesus appears offering reassurance "Peace be with you!" Even stuck at home, the resurrection reaches them and offers the same reassuring message given the women at the empty tomb. Do not be afraid.

3. Corinne - Where are we with the women? How do we rewrite our story with theirs?

Do not be afraid - doesn't it feel almost silly to say those words right now, Adam? I'm sure those words felt absurd to the disciples and the women at the empty tomb. Do not be afraid, when there is everything to fear. I find myself thinking about who the Marys are in our lives today, in the face of this pandemic. The people who are at the front lines, who see the scary stuff, who are caregivers, responsible for tending to the fragile parts of all of this. Doctors and nurses and PCAs and hospital janitors. Grocery clerks and garbage collectors and delivery drivers. Funeral directors. Family members of those who have died. They are standing on quaking ground. Instead of the teacher, the savior, the one they expected, they find an empty tomb.

But the Easter story tells us that these people are not alone. The angel proclaims to them, "Do not be afraid," not because there is nothing for them to be afraid of, but because they are not alone. For those of us with the privilege to stay home, we are called to be God's hands and feet in the world, walking alongside the women at the empty tomb. To call our elected officials and advocate for a higher minimum wage for essential workers, and adequate personal protective equipment for medical personnel, and paid sick leave. To send notes expressing our

gratitude and sew masks for those who need them and *stay home* to keep those who must leave safe. To pray. Yes, always to pray.

I find myself in these moments feeling like what I have to offer the women at the empty tomb is not enough. They are making this incredible sacrifice and I am feeling like *my* life is hard. But in this story of the resurrection - in this part where the scary stuff is happening and we don't yet know what's going on - we learn something amazing about resilience. We can make it through this part together if we all give the best of what we have to offer, and trust that what we bring is enough. Some days, our best might be resisting yelling at our quarantine partner for doing that horribly irritating thing *again*. Other days, our best might be going on a long walk in the sun to tend to our own mental health, Other days, our best might be calling our friends to check up on them. Other days, our best might be donating to a fund for folks who are unemployed and unable to access government support. None of it ever feels like enough - none of it ever will - but the core of our faith reminds us that we are in this together with God, that we are called to community, and that whatever we have, or are, or bring to that community is enough.

4. Adam

I am so glad we are in this together, you and I, the staff, along with this wonderful church community. We are still the church, called to bear witness to God's transforming love. I imagine that the disciples that first Easter Sunday were also trying to figure out how to keep their beloved community together. The good news of the resurrection comes to them even though they are stuck at home. It meets them where they are, renews their spirits and leads them to continue their witness. My spirit is renewed by seeing videos online of families singing and dancing together in their living rooms, watching Satya and many others sew masks for the hospitals, being called by Isaiah to protect our upcoming elections so that no one has to choose between staying healthy and voting, hearing stories from many of you of families being reunited and even reconciled by Zoom. We can be witnesses to the resurrection even now, wherever we are. When it seems that fighting this virus has taken so much away, the resurrection calls us back to life, reminding us that there is more than we can see, more to our lives than this pandemic, and more ways ways to experience and share God's love even now.

As we talked about how to celebrate Easter and the resurrection in the midst of this pandemic, it was tempting to hold off and wait. We wondered, how can we celebrate the joy of the resurrection now when so many people are either still living the tragedy of Good Friday or the emptiness and uncertainty of Holy Saturday? Shouldn't our Easter celebration wait until this is all over? The day when we no longer have to stay at home and social distancing ends will certainly feel like a resurrection day! Watching people dance and hug in the streets of Wuhan, China after their lockdown was lifted gives us hope for the day that we, too, will arise.

But the resurrection of Jesus didn't wait for conditions to be just right, for the world to be ready for God's gift of new life. It came in midst of the fear and uncertainty. It started small in the lives of just a few people and grew. Easter is a reality that meets us where we are and doesn't leave us there. Our Easter faith can be a source of spiritual resilience every day.

When we discover choices after feeling like we have no choice
When we are reminded we can always push the reset button with God and ourselves
When God continues to be faithful to God's people just like before
When we remember we are not alone and in fact are interconnected to all things
When God's love liberates us from fear and impossible circumstances

Corinne:

We are going to need spiritual resilience for what is ahead. There will be many days when we can't see the transformation happening. There will be many days when we feel worn down by the length of this upheaval and what it demands of us. There will be many days when we experience grief on a level we never have before. But if there's anything our faith has to teach us, it's that God is working on us, even when we can't see it. Maybe especially when we can't see it.

There is nothing redemptive about suffering. But there are ways of living that allow us to address our trauma, and heal, and grow stronger as a result. We are an Easter people, and that means that in the face of the worst, we grow. We grow stronger, we grow more connected, we grow in compassion and understanding. Like those green shoots just below the earth's surface, we may still be living in darkness today, but we are allowing ourselves to be transformed, preparing ourselves for a beautiful and long-awaited emergence, to be God's beloved community, today, tomorrow, and forevermore. Amen.

Shared Benediction

Corinne offers a word

Adam reads life is short

Axioms

Creating choice where there is no choice

You can always push the reset button

God continues to be faithful to God's people just like before

We are not alone and in fact are interconnected to all things

Being children of God liberates us from fear and impossible circumstances

Brainstorming Notes

1. Start with the text and what's going on
2. Pulling at the threads and where are we? How do we retell ourselves into God's story?
- 3.

Don't be afraid - I see and understand that you are.

Don't be afraid - here's what you can do next

- Our faith allows us to be seen and gives us some sort of direction

Surprising joy

Side-by-side sermon or conversation?

Adam starts with his thinking about the disciples, sequestered in

I talk about the people in our world who are like the women, going out

Resilience and transformation

Resurrection transformation happens through a sense of Jesus' presence, not the empty tomb

Resilience

- Creating choice where there is no choice
- There's always more than we can see
- The gift of new life is always given. There's always a redo.
- God is at work and transformation is possible, even if we can't see it right now
- How can we tell our story differently?
- The stillspeaking God
- "Next right step"