

*Wake Up Call* April 5, 2015 Easter Sunday John 20:1-18 Rev. Stephanie Ryder

Hallelujah! Jesus is alive! Death has lost its victory, and the grave has been denied!  
Jesus lives forever! He's alive! He's alive! Hallelujah! Jesus is alive!

That's one of my favorite Easter songs -- to me it represents the hope, joy and celebration that is Easter. As Christians, it is this hope upon which we base our faith. That death will not have the last word. That God will make a way out of no way. That light will overcome darkness. That no matter how terrible and cruel the events of the cross at Good Friday, Good Friday is not the end of the story. Easter follows. This is good news! And don't we need it. Because when we're living at the foot of the cross, witnessing the terror and agony and suffering in our world and in our own lives, it's hard to see beyond the darkness.

The Gospel passage read today starts in this place of darkness. On that first day of the week, the very first Easter Sunday, when it is still dark, very dark in Mary's world, she makes her way to the tomb. Though it is morning, it is likely that she hasn't slept much. I imagine she can't sleep with her heart so heavy from having witnessed her beloved Jesus so brutally killed, and that she is devastated as she makes her way to the tomb. She perhaps can barely make it there, stumbling as she sobs, conceivably falling down with grief, uncertain if she will make it back up on her feet. But she continues on, maybe because she longs to go and put her hand on that cold hard stone of the tomb, the closest she can get to touching Jesus himself. And when she arrives, she sees that the stone covering the tomb's entrance has been removed.

There are a number of types of seeing in this passage, a variety of Greek words for seeing that carry different meanings in the original language. This first seeing, when Mary sees the stone removed, is the Greek word *blepo*, which is primarily physical seeing with the suggestion of a needed action. In this case, Mary chooses to run. She runs to the disciples, and tells them, "They have taken the Lord, and we don't know where they have put him," and Peter and the other disciple, otherwise known as the Beloved Disciple, literally race to the tomb. The Beloved Disciple arrives first, and peers in and sees the linen wrappings, the grave clothes of Jesus, and this seeing too, is the word *blepo*; his response to this sight is to pause. He waits outside for Peter, who bolts straight into the tomb. Peter sees the strips of linen as well as the cloth that had wrapped Jesus' head, still lying in its place. This seeing of Peter is from the Greek verb *theoreo*, which comes from the noun *theoros*, meaning spectator. This is a seeing which means to gaze or behold in an analytical way. The Beloved Disciple now enters, following Peter in, and though he had seen the linen cloths from outside the tomb, this time he sees and believes. This seeing is *eidó*, a physical seeing that results in comprehension, the grasping of spiritual truth and understanding; it is a knowing. Both disciples then return home, leaving Mary outside the tomb crying.

As she is weeping, she bends over to look into the tomb, and sees two angels in white, apparently in the exact place that the disciples had seen the linen wrappings.

Mary sees them in the way that Peter had seen the linens – *theoreo* – with the gaze of spectator. They ask her, “Woman, why are you crying?” And she answers, “They have taken my Lord away, and I don’t know where they have put him.” She then turns around, and sees with this same spectator-type seeing, a man who, too, asks her why she is crying, and for whom she is seeking. She thinks it is the gardener, but it is Jesus himself. She doesn’t recognize him, perhaps because of her tears, or perhaps because her head is hung so low, or perhaps because she is not expecting it, she’s not expecting a miracle. She asks the man if he is the one who has taken Jesus, to let her know where he put the body so she can go get him. It is when Jesus calls her by name that she sees him for who he is. “Mary,” he says. She cries out in Hebrew, “Rabboni!” (“Teacher!”), and we presume that she leans in to grab him, to touch him, to feel the warmth of his skin again, because Jesus says, “Do not hold on to me. Go. Go to the disciples and tell them I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.” My God, your God. My God, your God. My God... this phrase takes me to another place...

In Mark’s gospel, the last words to leave Jesus lips, before he breathes his last breath, before the curtain of the temple is torn in two from top to bottom, before the centurion says, “Surely this man was the Son of God,” as Mary Magdalene and others look on, the last words to leave Jesus’ lips on the cross, are “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” In Aramaic, the ancient language of Palestine, this is translated, as it says clearly in Mark 15:34: *Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani. Eloi, Eloi, My God, My God.*

Last week my husband looked out the window and pointed and said, “Hey, look, there’s Eloi coaching soccer down at the field!” “Oh, he must be home from spring break,” I said. Eloi Vasquez was a friend of my sons. A couple of days later, after seeing him on the field, I heard that he had traveled to LA and was missing. I remember Eloi as one of those kids that everyone looked up to. He was respectful, reserved, polite, extremely talented and gifted academically and athletically. He was known to be a caring and responsible older brother. I remember one night when a big group of kids came over for dinner, and then all left to go who knows where, and Eloi stayed and waited for his dad to pick him up. In an era when many parents pick up their kids by waiting in their cars and texting them to come out, Eloi’s dad came to the door, introduced himself, shook our hands, stayed and talked awhile – a real gentleman. We knew all along, because of the kind of kid he was, that Eloi was destined for great things, and it was affirmed when he received a soccer scholarship to UC Berkeley. Many say he was bound to go pro. This past Monday, not a week after we had seen him on the field behind our house, word came that Eloi had been found, hit and killed by a car on the 10-freeway in LA.

...I don’t know why he ran across the highway that night, though I, and many others, have tried to come up with explanations. The newspaper and the autopsy and the oral reports likely will never give us those details. We don’t know why he ran into the highway, but we know that he is no longer with us as we once knew him. The Bible doesn’t give us details of Jesus’ resurrection, either -- how it happened, what it

looked like. It doesn't tell us that part. It doesn't give those details. We don't know how Jesus was resurrected, but we know that he lives. And because we know Jesus lives, we know Eloi lives.

There is a poem written in 1932 by Mary Elizabeth Frye, in response to her house-guest, Margaret Schwarzkopf, a German Jew, who had been concerned about her mother, who was ill in Germany, but she had been warned not to return home because of increasing anti-Semitic unrest. When Margaret's mother died, she told her host that she was heart-broken that she never had the chance to stand by her mother's grave and shed a tear. Frye composed a poem on a brown paper shopping bag. It is called *A Thousand Winds*:

**A Thousand Winds by Mary Elizabeth Frye**

Do not stand at my grave and weep.  
I am not there. I do not sleep.  
I am a thousand winds that blow.  
I am the diamond glints on snow.  
I am the sunlight on ripened grain.  
I am the gentle autumn rain.  
When you awaken in the morning's hush  
I am the swift uplifting rush  
Of quiet birds in circled flight.  
I am the soft stars that shine at night.  
Do not stand at my grave and cry;  
I am not there. I did not die.

I have permission to tell you an experience of one of our congregants. Ginger Gmahling shared with me something that happened in the depth of her grieving the recent death and burial of her father, a grieving I imagine was much like Mary walking to the tomb early that dark Sunday morning. In this place of utter despair, Ginger pulled into a parking space outside the post office in Ross. And in front of the parking space was a plot of earth, a plot of earth that looked to Ginger like the size of a grave, and growing from it, was a display of bright, yellow, healthy blooming daffodils. Ginger said that in that moment, she had a feeling of peace. It was a profound moment, where she felt everything stopped and the world was still. Daffodils had special meaning to her family (as she shared at her father's memorial a couple of weeks ago), and she thought it so interesting that they were in bloom at the time of her father's death. Ginger physically saw the daffodils, and recognized them as such, which is a feat in itself given her circumstances, yet she also saw them as something that brought her a new level of awareness and perception, and that is the touch of God.

This type of seeing in Greek is called *horaō*, related to *eido*, the seeing that caused the Beloved Disciple to believe, which is to see with the mind, to see with spiritual insight, and this is the final type of seeing in the passage read today, when Mary runs to the disciples with the news, "I have seen the Lord!" Mary saw the stone removed,

the angels in the tomb, and what she thought was the gardener, but it was when Jesus called her name that she was given the wake up call. Jesus says to Mary, “Do not hold on to me” – because it’s not about touching him physically that matters now. He has shown up, and will keep showing up. Mary understands this. His presence with her is going to be different now. It is in the thousand winds that blow, the diamond glints on snow, the daffodils that grow...

This showing-up of Jesus, this resurrection moment, can be something we see, like a grave-shaped border filled with daffodils, or it can be something we hear, that allows us to see, like the voice of someone, perhaps the voice of Jesus, calling our name. Our wake up call is when we see the light. It is a moment of grace given by God.

Biblical scholar N. T. Wright describes this experience as the coming-together of the holy spirit with our own spirit. While many thoughts in our mind seem to come from the ordinary flow of consciousness within us, sometimes we find other thoughts, which seem to come from somewhere else, hinting gently but powerfully at God’s love, our wake up call to holiness. A key part of Christian discipleship, he says, is to recognize the call and to nurture the facility of paying attention to it, as it may well be the voice of God’s own spirit. These are Easter wake up calls, witnesses to the resurrection. The glory of God, displayed in a miracle. We have a saying in our Compassionate Kids group: Coincidence, or miracle? The kids throw their hands in the air and respond, “Miracle!” It’s all in how you look at it. Do you see, or do you and believe?

Do not stand at my grave and cry. I am not there, I did not die. Do not cling to what you see physically, Jesus says, but cling to the internal experience and understanding of me. And now, go, tell the disciples, I am going to my Father and your Father, my God, Eloi, my God, and your God.

In Romans 8:38-39, Paul says, “I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” This is the power of resurrection. Nothing can separate us from the love of God, not even death. As we celebrate this Easter Day, may we be open to seeing and comprehending with spiritual insight the grace of God, that we may know God’s eternal love, and then share it with others. Thanks be to God.

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