

Family in light of resurrection

Easter Morning

April 21, 2019

John 20: 11-18

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In the Name of One God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

As we have gathered here this morning, some of us have brought our loved ones with us – parents, grandparents, grandchildren, perhaps grown children who live far away, friends, neighbors.

Worshipping together on Easter morning is a tradition that has withstood the secularization of our culture. There is something sacred about multiple generations worshipping together on this most joyful and holy day, sharing memories, hugs, a special Easter meal and some super sugary, high calorie, often messy after-dinner desert.

So, think about your family for a moment. However you define your family... your family may include dear friends or lovers, distant aunts and uncles, folks cut off who you haven't seen in years.

Think of the folks sitting beside you and the ones who have loved them through their years.

Think about the folks you have brought with you - present only in the depths of your heart.

Now, take a moment to think about how the shape of your family has changed over the last year.

Perhaps you have lost a parent.

Perhaps a dear friend has died.

Perhaps a child has left for college – or at least entered those teenage years in which they no longer speak to you.

Perhaps you have welcomed a new baby into the life of your family.

Or realized that you will never be able to have a child naturally or as you had dreamed.

Maybe you are watching your children grow and mature into these actual little humans who have independent thoughts and desires.

I remember talking with a mom once whose son had gone off to college. She shared with me an insight – her wonder tinged with a sense of remorse – saying, “I realized that up until now I have known that boy better than anyone else in the world. I have known everything about him. And now he knows himself more than I know him.”

Oh, how our relationships with our loved ones change and evolve!

Over and over again we face the loss of our loved ones –

or the loss of our image and understanding of them.

How we long to hold on to them – just as they are today, just as they were a few short weeks or months ago:

Small and chubby. Old and wrinkly. Bent over and broken.

Our loved ones - making bad jokes, telling good stories, sharing fine wine.

Their smile. Their smell. Their love...

Each night I play this game with me children, holding them as tight as I can and threatening to never let them go. They laugh now. One day I will look back and weep.

In the Gospel story we just heard, Mary has seen and recognized the Risen Christ right before her eyes. She has turned from anguish and confusion into hope and longing.

Here is her friend and teacher – alive again.

Here is her Lord and Savior standing before her, tenderly speaking her name.

She wants what we all want – to hold our loved ones tight, to never let them go.

She wants to hold on to Jesus and the past that they shared.

But Jesus withdraws from her.

Refuses her physical advance.

"Do not hold on to me," he says.

He is not admonishing her or minimizing her desire. Instead he is meeting her longing with his own.

She want to embrace him in love and never let him go – and he wants the same for her. To hold and be held by the one He loves.

Yet, he wants it for her AND her friends – AND for the disciples – AND for you and me.

His love and embrace has no limit, no end.

God has come into the world for one purpose. God, through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, has shattered death and sin and accomplished his singular divine objective.

Here stands Jesus outside the empty tomb.

And his longing is for Mary, for her friends - his friends - for the whole world – to know and understand and share and spread the love He has for her – for them, for us.

"Do not hold on to me," he says, "because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

Some of us moderns might have a problem with understanding the science of the resurrection.

But we can understand simple grammar.

"Up to this point Jesus has [always] spoken about God as *the* father or - the father who sent me - or *my* father. He has called his followers disciples, servants and friends."

"Now," notes theologian NT Wright, "all that has changed."

Now *my* Father is *your* Father, *my* God is *your* God.

"Something has altered decisively.

Something has been achieved.

A new relationship has sprung to life like a sudden spring flower.

The disciples are welcomed into a new world:

a world where they can know God that way Jesus knew God,

where they can be intimate children with their father (NT wright).

Jesus has risen to *his* father and *our* father.

Our father!

Who art in heaven.

Who art - in our hearts.

As one scholar writes, "Jesus is with God, face unveiled, in the glory that he had with God before the world was made,

and he is intimately present within and among his own -

of the first and all later generations to whom he has returned as he promised - to fill them with a joy *no one* can take from them (Sandra Schneider 223).

In his last days with Mary and the other disciples, with his family and friends, Jesus spoke to them about what was to come.

He said a very long and poignant goodbye – alluding to his end - his death – this death that would be the birth of all things, of new creation, of new hope, light, and relationship.

“I will not leave you orphaned,” he said. “I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live.

On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me and I in you.”

Mary and the disciples are now truly Jesus’ sisters and brothers, alive with, in and through him – now and forever. And Mary must go and tell this good news to the others.

Through the light and promise of the resurrection, family, life, relationships and love have been redefined, renewed and realized. For Mary. For the disciples. For us.

Think again about how the shape of your family has changed over the last year – this time in light of the resurrection:

Perhaps you have welcomed a new baby into the life of your family.

Look with joy and wonder and awe at the new life that is before you - the possibility new life brings to the world.

Perhaps you realized that you will never be able to have a child naturally or as you had dreamed.

Remember that the Risen Lord’s first words are for those who grieve: “Woman, why are you weeping?” Jesus knows our tears. He has gone with us to the depths of our despair. He has come to raise us up with him.

Perhaps your children have left for college – or at least entered those teenage years in which they no longer speak to you.

Remember that last time you held them tightly – and remember you, like Mary - were able to let them go. Jesus has a new call for them to discover. Rejoice.

Perhaps you have lost a parent, a dear friend, a loved one.

Feel their presence with you this day. They are alive and with us, in and through Christ's love. Really and truly alive and with us. Come to the table and share the Eucharistic feast with them. Our experience of this feast is not bound by time or place.

And come to the table and feast with your brother Jesus.

He is here today, inviting us all into his embrace, his family, his heart – and his life's work of love.

Amen.

Alleluia!