

Are you ok?

I mean, really, are you doing ok?

If I answer that question honestly, my answer is I'm not sure. Personally I'm fine. My family is fine.

But I'm scared and I'm worried.

We are living in a time where people in this country are disappearing, living in a time when some of the most vulnerable people in our society – trans kids – are being used as political punching bags, living a time when it feels like so many of the institutions we rely on – institutions that are certainly not perfect but useful – are being dismantled and those who work in them attacked, living in a time when we are increasingly reaching a point of no return on the climate crisis, living in a time when those fleeing violence and famine came here looking for a place of hope to find a resounding response of, “you’re not welcome here,” living in a time when we worry about the future our kids will inherit.

I don't want to assume that all of you are feeling the same way, but I've had enough conversations with enough of you to know that a lot of you are.

How we answer that question, “Are you ok?” is really closely related to how we answer this question:

“Where are you finding hope?”

One of the reasons so many of us are struggling right now is because finding hope is not easy right now, especially on a macro level. And the question of hope, for us who have gathered here as part of a Christian community on Easter Sunday, on Resurrection Sunday, is also a question of faith.

Do we have faith that the claims we make in this place are true? Are Trustworthy?

Because if they are true, if they are trustworthy, there is always, always, always a reason to hope.

We are here to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus, to celebrate that life has defeated death, to celebrate that love has overcome evil, to celebrate the justice has overcome oppression, to celebrate that peace has overcome violence. You see, the resurrection is not just about one person rising from the dead 2000 years ago, it's about the way of Jesus, the way of love, overcoming all of the world's evil, all of the world's pain, all of the world's suffering. To believe in the resurrection is to believe that even when the powers of evil do their very best to crush love, love resurrects...no matter what.

So to be clear, when we say Jesus is risen, this is what we are proclaiming:

When legal residents are not afforded due process and are sent to a torture chamber in El Salvador, we are proclaiming love will find a way.

When people in our great universities here in this city are told to comply or else, we are proclaiming love will find a way.

When it feels like the very foundation of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness is escaping from our grasp, we are proclaiming love will find a way.

To say that Jesus is risen is also to say that love will find a way...no matter what!

And yet...that's not an easy thing to believe...not right now.

But guess what, it has never been an easy thing to believe.

For decades, queer people were told, in places like this, in churches, that their love was not a valid way of loving. And yet, queer people locked arms with their beloved and stared into the condemnation and judgment and declared, "Love will find a way."

In my home state, in Alabama, when the powers of white supremacy and state sanctioned violence unleashed dogs and fire hoses, marchers locked arms, stared down the hate, as they sang "We shall overcome," and declared to the world, "Love will find a way."

When a fledgling movement of people who formed little house churches because they believed that Jesus of Nazareth had risen from the dead, when they were arrested, tortured, and killed, they locked harms and declared, "Love will find a way."

But here's the thing...all of these people found the strength to live out this hope when the outcome was by no means certain. If anything, it looked like the outcome would be that they would lose, that they would be crushed. And yet, they chose to live out of the reality of love anyway.

And I think maybe, just maybe, that is where we too can find hope today.

That's what happened to Mary Magdalene in our Scripture.

Earlier this week, we heard the story of Jesus' betrayal, arrest, and death. And after all of that, when all of the disciples had fled, Mary alone remained. She was there when Jesus was killed and our passage begins this morning with Mary going to the tomb.

Think about what she must have felt. Jesus may have been the first person in Mary's life to treat her like a full human. In Jesus, Mary found something. She found something that gave her life meaning, that gave her purpose, that helped her see her own value and worth as a person. And the one person who offered her all this had now been taken from her in the most brutal of ways.

Surely she was devastated. And yet, for some reason, when every other follower of Jesus was hiding behind locked doors in fear and despair, Mary chose to wait by the tomb. We don't know why. Maybe she was there because she had nowhere else to go. But I tend to think that there was something else going on. Somehow Mary just couldn't let go of the hope she had found in Jesus. At this point it wasn't rational. I doubt Mary could even explain why she at the tomb. But for some reason, she chose to cling to even just a sliver of hope in spite of all evidence that Jesus was gone forever.

My favorite writer is Wendell Berry and we've printed one of his poems in the bulletin. The last line of that poem is "Practice Resurrection."

I love that line because we normally think of the resurrection as something to believe in, but Berry invites us to see it more as something to live into, something to practice. Listen to part of his poem:

So, friends, every day do something
that won't compute. Love the Lord.
Love the world. Work for nothing.
Take all that you have and be poor.
Love someone who does not deserve it.
Denounce the government and embrace
the flag. Hope to live in that free
republic for which it stands.
Ask the questions that have no answers.
Invest in the millenium. Plant sequoias.
Expect the end of the world. Laugh.
Laughter is immeasurable. Be joyful
though you have considered all the facts.

Practice Resurrection

I wonder if we would know the hope of the resurrection if Mary hadn't been willing to practice resurrection even before she could believe it. Perhaps, the story of the cross would have been the end of the story because we would not have known the rest— we would not have known that Jesus was raised from the dead if Mary hadn't stayed by the tomb. In a way, then, the hope of the resurrection is only possible because Mary was willing to practice resurrection before she could believe it.

You see, friends, I believe the hope of Easter is not just about what God does for us but about what God wants to do with us. So if you want to know if the story of Jesus' resurrection is trustworthy, then I suggest we take a page out of Mary's book and live into this hope even before we're certain of it.

Welcome the stranger.

Stand for justice.

Be a peacemaker.

Love everyone.

Practice Resurrection.