

Frozen with the Other Mary: 2015 Easter Sermon
The Monroe Congregational Church, UCC
Rev. Jennifer Gingras
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Matthew 28: 1-10

Did you ever play the game "Freeze tag" as a child? A group of kids runs around and whoever is chosen to be "it" has to chase them and touch them to freeze them in place. The first person to stumble or move from their "frozen position" becomes "it" for the next round.

There are moments in all of our lives that are frozen in time. These might bring good or bad memories; they are moments of utter joy or moments of profound grief. These snapshots of life become locked in our hearts because of the power they hold. You can almost relive them because they are frozen in time.

Remember? (Give time for each to be remembered)

- Your first kiss
- The moment you lost a person you loved
- Receiving your first paycheck
- The day a child was born

Easter morning was one of those frozen-in-time moments for Mary Magdalene and the woman our scripture calls, "the other Mary."

They woke up that day to the chilling reality of a world without the One who had completely changed their lives. He was so full of love, energy and healing power. They had seen him bring that forth time and time again. Now suddenly their whole new world and new life were gone.

That terrible image of his lifeless body hanging broken on a Roman cross was frozen in their minds. Each moment since that moment seemed to drag on, and the grief hung heavy around their shoulders.

Much of that weekend was spent at Jesus' graveside. We might call it a wake, but with nothing else to do and the light of their lives extinguished, for them it was sacred time. A numb fog-like spirit surrounded the women. They sat there on an ancient stone bench for hours, watching wealthy Joseph of Arimathea carefully lay Jesus' body in the garden tomb.

This was the only way they knew to stay close to him. Drawn by love, they sat there in that strange silent period that comes to all of us when someone we love so very much is taken. We wait, not sure why, but we wait -- unable to go back to what was and not sure how to move forward into what will be.

Mary and the "other" Mary came back to revisit their grief early on that first Easter Morning, as those who have experienced tragedy often do.

What they didn't expect was for joy to cut through their rock hard grief like a red hot poker through a block of ice!

"He is not here; for he has been raised"

This changes everything!

From the hopeless fog that descended upon the earliest followers of Jesus Christ, to the stunned victims of the world's worst tragedies - these words change everything.

No matter how long the road or dark the way, our resurrection faith

- proclaims hope in the face of despair,
- light in the midst of darkness,
- joy in the night of sorrow and most of all...
- life in a glorious victory over death!

Maybe it is difficult to wrap our minds around the impact these words had on the two Mary's. Into the early dawn when light was just beginning to disperse the shadows around a garden tomb, the earth literally shifted under their feet!

"Don't be afraid," an angel's voice cries out.

The women take to heart everything that the angel says, except for that part about not being afraid. They leave the tomb with fear and great joy. They are joyful, but it does not appear that they feel exactly safe. They are living in a world where the ground is not staying put under their feet and where at least one of the dead has not stayed dead. Both frightened and joyful, they run to tell the disciples. On the way, they run into Jesus, who like the angel before him, repeats the words... "Do not be afraid." It is the last anyone speaks of fear in the Gospel.

As the first Christians came to recognize the risen Christ, they were forever changed. They became bold in their actions and speech. It is as if their security came from the inside out. They were not afraid of people who scoffed at their claims. They were not afraid of authorities who ordered them to stop speaking of Jesus. They were free from what the neighbors thought about them and free from what the established power structure could do to them.

What might that kind of freedom mean for you?

How might it change the way you listen to the nightly news?

How it might it change the way you pass a stranger on the sidewalk?

How might it change the way you imagine who was against you and who was for you?

Do not be afraid. Tectonic plates are shifting, yes, but it is because God is creating a new heaven and a new earth. Do not be afraid. Your life and your security are where they have always been-with Christ in God. And, brothers and sisters, Christ is risen!

Easter is filled with all kinds of glorious phrases and songs and prayers. We sing, "Christ the Lord is Risen Today! Alleluia!" Millions of Christians will join in saying "Alleluia! Christ is Risen!" and the response comes back, "The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!" Our scripture reading proclaims, "He is not here, for he has been raised!"

On this Easter Sunday, there are three other words that grab my imagination. On the surface, they pale in comparison to the amazing things which announced at Jesus' resurrection.

But these words bring hope to you and to me and to every person who has ever felt very small in a universe of important people. Let these words sink in for a moment...

"The other Mary!"

There was of course, Mary Magdalene, who we all know so well. But who else came to the garden tomb to hear those earth-shifting, life changing words? Peter, Chief of Apostles? The Roman Emperor? How about the Kings from the East? Maybe they would be the proper audience for the first announcement of God's stunning victory over death?

No... it was not the rich, powerful and famous who were chosen to hear the words. As Matthew's gospel tells it, there were two women who had faithfully ministered at Jesus's side who were the first witnesses to carry the resurrection back to the disciples, and on to the wider world.

She is such an anonymous figure. There are so many Mary's to keep track of in scripture and this one doesn't even have a last name. And yet, there she is, right at the center of the most incredible moment of all time! There she is when God shows up and turns the world inside out and upside down in a way that changes everything for everybody. And maybe that's just where we can find ourselves too.

No matter who you are, where you've been, what your station is in life or how life has been for you, the glorious truth of this Easter celebration is that the victory of life over death is for you!

It is for "the other Mary," and for you and for me! As is this communion meal that we share in celebration and in praise. May it nourish us, in body and soul. Happy Easter, and Amen.