

St. Andrew's Sermons
The Rev. John Rohrs
Easter Sunday 2017

While it was still dark, Mary Magdalene walked to the tomb. She must have been exhausted, and afraid. Surely her mind was racing, full of memories, questions, grief. Only two weeks before, Jesus had raised her brother from the dead. A few days ago he was in their home again for supper, and he was so alive. He was more than alive; it was like he could do anything. Everywhere he went, something amazing happened, and people followed, and now this. It didn't make sense. How could this be the end?

Finally, Mary arrived at the tomb, only to find it empty. Emotion and exhaustion took hold, and she broke down weeping. Two angels appeared and tried to comfort her, but it was no use. Jesus himself appeared, but in the fog of grief, she mistakes him for the gardener. The resurrection is unfolding before her eyes, but it's impossible to see. Even for Mary, Jesus' closest friend, it's hard to imagine that love and life could truly conquer death. Only when he speaks her name does the fog lift. "Teacher!" she cries, and the dawn of Easter breaks.

I just finished reading a book called *Immunity to Change*. It's about how each of us as individuals and as a collective – whether in families, businesses, organizations – how we resist change. The authors say it's almost like part of our immune system. We subconsciously resist change in order to protect ourselves from some underlying fear. So, we have a goal – let's say to be more healthy, to expand our business, to be a better manager or parent – but we unknowingly work against that goal because of some deeper, hidden conviction: that we aren't good enough, that we aren't worthy of love, that we're destined to fail. The only way to overcome this, the authors say, is to face those fears. Only then can we transform ourselves and others.

I wonder if the same isn't true of our faith. I wonder if sometimes we are like Mary, protecting ourselves from believing the impossible. Here we are on Easter morning, surrounded by flowers and trumpets and alleluias. It's a joyful celebration – the pinnacle of our faith – but let's be clear: it is also a dramatic upheaval of everything we thought we

knew. The resurrection doesn't make sense. It defies the laws of nature. It stakes a claim on us that is hard to square with the realities of the world: in the face of war and hunger, illness and oppression, it can be hard to believe that life overcomes death, and that love wins in the end.

Sometimes, it seems impossible, and so in small and subtle ways we practice our immunity. We protect our hearts from the impact of the resurrection. We live in fear instead of hope, as though death retains its power. We live divided, as though love is a scarce resource. We live constrained, doubting that we are worthy or capable of more.

But it doesn't have to be that way. Today, we are invited to take the risk of faith. Faith is not about certainty or reason. It doesn't conform to the pattern of our lives or even to the facts on the ground. Faith is about making a leap, and trusting in the promises of God. It's about facing our fears, and reclaiming our sense of wonder. Today we are called to be people of the resurrection, and through our lives to give witness to its reality. We must be the change we seek, as Gandhi said. If we live as though Christ is risen, I suspect we will find it is true. We will discover evidence of resurrection everywhere we look. We and the world around us will be transformed.

Today is God's eternal yes to us. Yes, we are worthy of love. Yes, life continues beyond the grave. Yes, a new creation is at hand. Christ is risen. We are people of the resurrection. Let us go forth, proclaiming the news that our world needs to hear: Christ is risen! The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!