

Easter Sunday 2021

Living God, long ago, faithful women proclaimed the good news of Jesus' resurrection, and the world was changed forever. Teach us to keep faith with them, that our witness may be as bold, our love as deep, and our faith as true. Amen.

I wanted to share with you, the Easter Message from our Presiding Bishop, Michael Curry. “When I get to heaven — and I know it may sound presumptuous for me to say it, but I live by grace and believe in amazing grace — when I get to heaven, I certainly want to see the Lord. But I want to see dear members of family and friends, those who have gone on before, the many people I want to sit down and have some conversation with. Of all the biblical people, aside from the Lord himself, when I get to heaven, I want to meet Mary Magdalene. Mary Magdalene, who was one of the people, one of the women, who followed the way and teachings of Jesus and who probably provided much of the funding for his movement. Mary Magdalene, who with some of the other women and only one of the male disciples, stood with his mother, Mary, at the cross as he died. Mary Magdalene, who, even after he died, on that Easter morning, got up with some of the other women early in the morning, before the day had begun, in the dark, got up to perform the rituals of love to anoint the body of Jesus in his grave.

I want to ask her, “Mary, tell me what got you up that day. Tell me what got you to go to the tomb early in the morning when it was dark, and you could barely see. Why did you get up and go to anoint his body? Mark’s Gospel says that you and the other women said to each other, you knew that Jesus had been buried in that tomb that had been provided by Joseph of Arimathea, with Nicodemus’ help, but a large stone had been rolled in front of the doorway, into the tomb. And one of the women said to the other, ‘Who will roll away the stone for us?’ You knew the stone was there. You knew you couldn’t move it. And yet you got up and you went anyway. Mary, tell me your secret.”

I suspect she probably will say, “Well, we didn’t know how we were going to roll away the stone, but we loved him, and we got up and went anyway. It was hard because it was dark,

but we loved him, and we got up and we went anyway. Those roads could be dangerous at night, but we love Jesus, and we got up and we went anyway. Who will roll away the stone for us? We did not know, but we loved him, and we got up and we went anyway. And let me tell you what love can do for you. When we got to the tomb, the stone had already been rolled away. And we shouted our hallelujahs and shouted our hallelujahs. He is risen.”

Last year in March, on March 13th to be precise, another Mary Magdalene, her name, Barbara, Barbara Clementine Harris, bishop of the church, a voice of love, and justice, and compassion, a voice of deep and profound faith, first woman to be consecrated a bishop in Anglican Christianity, died and entered eternal life. This was early in the pandemic.

Fortunately for us, Dean Kelly Brown Douglas had worked with Bishop Barbara to make sure that her memoir was completed, and they completed it. She gave it the title from the words of a gospel song that says, and I quote:

Hallelujah anyhow

Never let your troubles get you down

Whenever troubles come your way

Hold your hands up high and say

Hallelujah anyhow!

Those words characterize the life of Bishop Barbara: hallelujah anyhow. In spite of hardship and difficulty, hallelujah anyhow. In spite of injustice and bigotry, hallelujah anyhow. In spite of war and violence, hallelujah anyhow. And that, my friends, is the spirit of Mary Magdalene. That, my friends, is the tenacity of those who would follow in the footsteps of Jesus and his way of love. In spite of hardship and toil, hallelujah anyhow. In spite of the fact that this Easter is the anniversary of the assassination and the martyrdom of Martin Luther King, Jr., hallelujah anyhow. In spite of the fact that these are hard times, hallelujah anyhow.

Our work goes on. Our labor for love continues. We will not cease, and we will not give up until this world reflects less our nightmare and more God’s dream where there’s plenty good room for all God’s children. Hallelujah anyhow.

When I get to heaven, I can't wait to hear Mary Magdalene and Bishop Barbara tell me he's risen. Hallelujah anyhow. Amen." End quote

Now don't start moving on to the Baptismal Promises just yet. One Amen does not complete this sermon. The Presiding Bishop certainly knows a whole lot more than I do and I enjoy reading his messages. This Easter Message resonated with me for a lot of reasons. My thoughts over this past week, about why Mary Magdalene went out so early that morning were a little different though.

I spent a lot of time yesterday comparing all 4 gospel accounts of the Resurrection. John's account is different from the rest. I could not understand why the women would have been going to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body? We read John's account on Good Friday, which said that Joseph and Nicodemus had placed about 75 lbs. of myrrh and aloes, in with Jesus' body, wrapped him, and placed him in the tomb. So why anoint him again? Inquiring minds want to know. Of course, there is the logical explanation from the women's standpoint, that if you want something done right.....

Anyway, John's gospel mentions only Mary Magdalene coming early that morning, and does not mention her coming to anoint Jesus' body. Certainly, she would have been aware that the large, heavy stone would have covered the entrance to the tomb. But as Bishop Curry said, she came anyway. I thought a lot about this. Why would she have come? Maybe it was to anoint His body, I don't know. I suspect that she was still in shock. I suspect that she deeply missed Jesus and needed to be near him. Sitting in an upper room in fear of the Jewish leaders, may have been on her mind, but she came anyway. Yes, she knew that she could not move the stone by herself as it would have taken several people to do this. I think she just wanted to sit outside of the tomb, in the garden, and to grieve. But the stone had been moved! John does not mention if she looked inside to see if Jesus' body was there. In fact, she runs to tell the disciples that someone had moved the body. Peter, and I assume John, run to look, and see that indeed, Jesus is not there. The wrappings folded. Of course, Mary is still upset and is crying. Do the guys stay to comfort her? Heck no, they leave her there and go home. Mary looks in the tomb and sees two angels sitting there. Do they

comfort Mary? Of course not. Although, 'Woman, why are you weeping' might be words of comfort for an angel. So, above all rational reasoning, Jesus steps in to reassure his dear friend, that He really was alive and had risen as he said he would.

As Bishop Curry said, we have seen far too many tragedies and deaths from COVID over the past year; too many jobs lost; too many people who have been disenfranchised and marginalized; too many people who have gone without food, too many that have lost their homes, and too many who are alone and isolated. Maybe, we too find ourselves struggling to find hope when we feel so overwhelmed. Like Mary, we find our hope in the fact that Jesus has risen! He is alive! He has not left us orphaned.

Our work goes on. It has to! It is our job as followers of Jesus Christ. Our labor for love must continue. We cannot cease, and we must not give up until this world reflects God's dream 'where there's plenty good room for all God's children'. It will not be easy, it never is. The path will be difficult. But as the song says:

No matter what comes my way
I lift my voice and say
Hallelujah anyhow!

Amen!