

Dawn – Matthew 28:1-10

“As the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb.”

All the Easter stories begin like this – in the dark. And this darkness is an appropriate metaphor for times in our Christian experience and times in our lives and for large swaths of human history. As you know, we are currently doing a series on *Searching for Sunday* by Rachel Held Evans, and she writes, *“I find myself wondering if perhaps every generation of Christians has felt itself at the edge of this precipice, waiting for resurrection and worrying it might not come.”*



This painting by Russian artist Mikhail Nesterov captures that darkness and the glimmers of light, the women coming, not bearing spices in Matthew’s account, but simply coming because, in their grief, they

cannot stay away, they cannot be anywhere else.

But they are startled! First by an earthquake. Matthew uses earthquakes three times to describe revelatory events; the storm on the sea Jesus calms is an earthquake, when Jesus dies there is an earthquake and here at the resurrection. Secondly, they are more than startled by the sight of an angel opening the tomb where Jesus’ body had been laid. There is some irony in the next verse – that the tomb being open and empty results in the guards “[becoming] like dead men”.

But as different as day to night is this experience for the women, *“Do not be afraid,”* says the angel, *“I know you are looking for Jesus... He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said... Go quickly and tell his disciples....”*

“So, verse eight, “they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy!”

And this is how the news of Jesus’ resurrection spread. Not by every person witnessing earthquakes and angels, but through the words and lives of women and men, who came to be known as Christians, who were witnesses to the resurrection in their lives and also in their deaths. And we continue to hear and experience the resurrection in this same way.

German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, *“The early mornings belong to the Church of the risen Christ. At the break of light it remembers the morning on which death and sin lay prostrate in defeat and new life and salvation were given to humankind.”*

Searching for Sunday, by its very name, explores how the resurrection continues to be witnessed. It is about searching for Sunday resurrection. Evans does this by exploring the sacraments from many church traditions –

visible signs of God's grace in our lives. Through *baptism* – how ordinary people are part of telling us that that we are a beloved child of God. Through *confession* – how Christianity names and addresses the reality of sin – that the evil we see in the world is also found in us. Through *commissioning* – how God still calls us to share in the work of resurrection. Through *communion* – how this work “*overcomes the deepest estrangements between human beings.*” Through *confirmation* – knowing that we walk with God throughout our lives. And in the weeks to come we are looking doing God's healing work and being signs of God's kingdom of justice and joy.

But there is really no limit to the sacraments – no limit to the number of outward signs of inward grace we can reveal in our interactions with one another.

“If I have learnt anything in this journey,” Evans writes in the final chapter, “its that Sunday morning sneaks up on us – like dawn, like resurrection, like the sun that rises a ribbon at a time [in poet Emily Dickinson's words]. We expect a trumpet and a triumphant entry, but as always God surprises us by showing up in ordinary things: in bread, in wine, in water, in words, in sickness, in healing, in death, in a manger of hay, in a mother's womb, in an empty tomb.”

God surprises us – Jesus meets and greets us on the way – showing up in ordinary things and in the words and the lives of ordinary people changed by this extraordinary morning and God's extraordinary love.

Can I ask you to take a moment now – in silence – to give thanks for one person who has shared – in their words and in their life – the message of Jesus' resurrection with you...

Can I also ask you to imagine, that as the women met Jesus on the way in our reading this morning, you meet Jesus on the way and Jesus greets you. How do you respond....?

Hallelujah! Christ is risen. In our lives too let us show that he is risen indeed!