

The Rev. Joan M. Kilian

Trinity Episcopal Church

Genesis 1:1 – 2:4a Exodus 14:10 – 15: 1 Isaiah 55: 1 – 11 Daniel 3: 8 – 28
 Jonah 1: 1 – 12, 15 – 17, 3: 1 – 5, 10 – 4:11 Psalm 114 Romans 6: 3 – 11 Matthew 28: 1 – 10

“Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob!” Tremble indeed! Tremble, but not in fear! Tremble with excitement and great joy! Tremble with awe and wonderment! This night, the Lord has blessed us as never before! This night, the God of Jacob is indeed present in a powerful enough way to make the whole earth quiver, to make living, life-giving water flow from rock, to make new life where there was only cold, hard death.

Tremble, O earth at the presence of the God of Jacob! Surely King David must have felt the overwhelming and humbling and splendid (all at the same time) presence of our God in order to write these words! How else could one describe it?? Surely you felt the earth move as well? To say that an extraordinary thing has happened is an incredible understatement, and I really don’t know what to think. Or believe.

I’m Mary, the “*other* Mary,” as the Gospel writers so eloquently identify me. I am the mother of James and Joseph. As soon as we could after the Sabbath was over, Mary of Magdala – one of the other Marys, there are a lot of us! – and I hurried to the tomb where Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus had laid Jesus’ poor body. We didn’t really expect to *do* anything there, since we knew the tomb had been sealed with the stone, and we surely weren’t going to be able to dislodge it. We just wanted to be able to *be* in the last place where we had been with Jesus, and to sit Shiva.

Sitting Shiva is a very old tradition with us. It is how we grieve. And Mary and I very much needed to grieve our enormous loss. Normally, after someone dies, the parents, spouse, children and siblings gather in the home of the deceased for seven days and there is a ritual for mourning the loss. According to some of our scholars, the tradition goes all the way back to Noah and before the flood, when there were seven days after they entered the ark but before the waters came. Shiva means seven, and the seven days, the scholars say, were to mourn Methuselah, the oldest person who ever lived. Others of our scholars point to the story of our ancestor Joseph, when he mourned for his father, Jacob, for seven days. So that is what we do.

Normally, Shiva would begin immediately after the burial in the home of the deceased, with the immediate family. But Jesus didn’t have a home really. He was raised in Nazareth, of course, but truth be told, he was from everywhere and nowhere. So there isn’t really a home for us in which to sit Shiva, which is why we came to the garden and the tomb. As for the family, well of course, his mother, Mary, - yes, another of us Marys, - is with us, but not his siblings. But you remember, don’t you, when Jesus asked who his mother and brothers and sisters are, and his response so opened up the idea of family – anyone who does the will of God – so we consider ourselves family, Jesus’ sisters and brothers.

So that’s why Mary the Magdalene and I were at the tomb so early, to sit Shiva. To mourn. To comfort. To say goodbye. Goodbye to so many things, it seemed – our wonderful, witty, faithful friend, Jesus; our hopes that he really was the Messiah for whom we’ve been waiting; our dreams of a new Israel; our trust in his promises. All of it had seemed to come to naught in his death.

But then...but THEN! The earth trembled and shook – what is it that David writes – “God’s lightnings light up the world, the earth sees it and trembles!” Or elsewhere, “The Lord is King! Let the

peoples tremble! [God] sits enthroned upon the cherubim, let the *earth* quake!" Surely the power of God was in this place!! Perhaps the shaking and trembling was a result of God's anger at this senseless suffering and death of such a man, such a man of God's own choosing. Perhaps the shaking and trembling were God's way of getting our attention, because it definitely did! Perhaps, it was merely God acting on our behalf to cause the stone to roll away. Perhaps – well, perhaps we will never know exactly. And to tell you the truth, even all of the earth moving and shaking was outshone by the glorious presence of someone ... something ... some being.

I haven't ever seen an angel before, so I'm not really sure what one should look like or if they even all look the same, but if ever there was a candidate for being an angel, this being would be it! Perhaps the brilliance, the radiance, of the light was so great because of its contrast with the darkness of our grief and despair of only moments earlier. Or perhaps, it really was that intense, that luminous – like a thousand suns glimmering off the waters of the Sea of Galilee. Did the angel's arrival cause the quaking of the earth? Was it the angel or the quaking which moved the stone? Does it even matter? Because I just remember seeing the stone rolled back, the tomb opened, and this being sitting, just as casual as you please, legs swinging, wings ruffling, on the top of that huge stone. If I didn't know better, I'd almost say that this being, this angel, was grinning right back at us as we just stared in utter shock and amazement. Then I realized that the guards which the chief priests had sent were no longer standing by the tomb. They were in fact lying on the ground – whether afraid or also in shock or having fainted or died, we didn't know. They didn't move a muscle.

Suddenly, in a sound like wind in the trees, like water in a brook, the angel spoke to us. It's first words were for us to not be afraid! How could we *not* be afraid, and yet, that helped us know that, somehow, this was all going to be okay. The angel already knew that we were there to be with Jesus, and also that Jesus had been crucified, so from where could this being have come, except from God? We could see with our own eyes that the tomb was empty, but now, the angel told us that Jesus wasn't there, and invited us in to check out the damp, cool, empty tomb that smelled, not of a dead body, but of the earth, and spring rains, and flowers. It wasn't just that someone had somehow moved Jesus' lifeless body, but that Jesus wasn't there because Jesus was lifeless no longer. Jesus was – IS – very much alive, raised from the dead, like what is supposed to happen on the last day. I don't think we even began to understand what the angel was trying to tell us. I still don't understand. How do you understand what 'raised from the dead' really means? It has never happened before!

Then, the angel gave us a message, a message of affirmation that Jesus is going to meet us back in Galilee, and that we – WE! – are charged with telling everyone else! If we were having trouble believing it right in front of our own eyes, and hearing it with our own ears, how in the world were we going to tell everyone else and expect *them* to believe it? Well, we couldn't be bothered with doubt - we had been given work to do! Mary and I turned to look at each other and then, without another backwards glance, we ran down the path towards the city. Giddy with joy and shock – shock in a good way – and with our minds racing and exploding with possibilities, and our hearts, our bodies, trembling at the very presence of the God of our father Jacob, we ran. We ran, and we laughed as we ran, and we kept looking at one another in disbelief, shaking our heads, and laughing again and again with great joy.

Perhaps God knew of our hesitancy and our fears of not being believed, because all of a sudden, we no longer had to wait until Galilee to see our Lord, our teacher, our dear friend, Jesus, for there he was, right in the middle of our path. "Greetings!" he said, as if none of the events of the last few days had transpired, as if we were simply seeing each other at the village market. How there could be any room left in us to be further shocked is beyond me, but we stopped dead, and then, at the very same

moment, Mary and I, we both fell at his feet, crying tears of sheer, undiluted joy and yes, disbelief. How could this be? How CAN this be? I still don't know.

Jesus gave us the same message as did the angel – to tell everyone to meet him in Galilee. Why were we so blessed as to be able to see him already? I don't know. There are so many things I don't know. But what I do know, without a shadow of a doubt and to the depth of my being, is that God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, has acted today, just as God has always acted to save us, the people of God. I can't make you believe me, I can't prove that Jesus has been raised from the dead, I can't even prove that God is there behind all this. I can only share *my* experience of the living God. "Go tell everyone the Good News," Jesus and the angel-being told us. So I'm starting with you! Alleluia! Jesus, God's anointed one, is risen! Alleluia! Pass it on...and tell them 'the *other* Mary' sent you!

+