

First Mennonite Church Edmonton
“” - Easter Sunday
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A few weeks ago, I reflected in my weekly letter that it felt like so much of our Lent worship series was leading us to the edge or threshold of something deeper. We were brought to the edge of the sea; the edge of deep relationships. We were taken to the edge of the woods; the edge of deep commitment. To the edge of deep wisdom by gazing at the changing sky; to the edge of the wilderness; and the edge of deep healing, to the edge of deep growth found deep in the earth, and finally to deep hope witnessed at the edge of a strong current. We have been taken to the edge of all of these ‘deep’ things, and today we’re being invited to deep living.

Relationships, commitment, wisdom, healing, growth, and hope are all aspects of deep living. I think it’s quite fitting, as it is the culmination of our whole lent series; the embrace of all these things we’ve been invited into more deeply. And so once again, we’ve been brought to the threshold of something deep, and we’ve been left with the choice of whether or not to walk into it. I see this choice, modelled in the Easter story through the eyes of Mary.

Now, I can only speculate as to what Mary might have felt as she approached Jesus’ tomb on this Easter morning. Whether she was rounding a bend, or cresting a ridge, I wonder what was happening inside of her when she first saw that the tomb was open. I don’t know if it was fear, or anger bubbled up inside of her. I don’t know if she was shocked, or simply beside herself at the sight of the stone being rolled away. What we do know, is Mary’s first reaction, and that’s to run to the rest of the disciples to tell them that the tomb is open, and, as far as she could tell, Jesus’ body had been stolen away.

What follows is a footrace to the tomb and the discovery that not only is the tomb open, but Jesus isn’t there. Everyone stands on the edge of the tomb looking in, however, few are brave enough to enter this place of death, at least until Peter arrives. Bullish as he is, Peter goes straight into the tomb and witnesses that this is different than an expected grave robbery, something else has happened, though he can’t put his finger on it just yet. Understanding but not yet believing, a confusing choice of words by the Gospel writer, Peter, and the rest of the disciples leave.

Only after everyone has left, does Mary, herself, look into the tomb and the reality had settles in that Jesus’ body, the body that she was coming to anoint, honour and lovingly tend two was

gone. In the face of this reality she weeps. Mary has come to the threshold of the empty tomb..and she enters..and she sees...and she weeps. What she knows, what she has known, what she had expected, is gone. What's there, is something she didn't expect. Mary finds the tomb not empty, but is instead faced with two angels, and turning around she meets Jesus.

As I think about Mary's experience on Easter morning, I can't help but see our own journey paralleling hers. She first approaches the tomb, then runs away (in her defence it's to tell the other disciples of her discovery), then approaches the tomb, and then after approaching the tomb a second time, she embraces the new life found in Jesus' resurrection. Isn't this so much of our own journey too? We step to the threshold of something new, and sometimes we can cross the threshold, and sometimes we need to pause, and other times, we need to leave and come back to it.

When we've been brought to the edge of change, sometimes it's a challenge to take that first step into the unknown. We want to hold onto what we know. We want to grasp on to what is safe and familiar. We like the predictability of routine. And in this last year, so much of that has been turned on its head for us. We've been forced to embrace different, whether we want to or not. We have been forced to pivot plans. Holidays, family 'gatherings', visiting with people, worship, even the basics of grocery shopping, have all changed, and we've been thrust into a different way of living. And for a year we've been having to figure out how to live differently.

Now, the truth is, not everyone might be feeling Easter joy today, nor is everyone in a place where they're ready to embrace this Easter call to 'deep living,' some might be in a place of 'deep surviving.' This year, after a year of pandemic restrictions, restrictions that are good, and also restrictions that are beginning to wear on ones spirit, it might feel like today is more Holy Saturday than Easter Sunday. Some may find themselves with Mary coming to the empty tomb and that's as far as they can go. And I can understand that, and I say that's alright, you're not alone, because that's where I find myself this year.

This year, like Mary, I'm able to come to the tomb, the empty tomb...unlike Mary, I haven't yet met the risen Jesus. I'm still waiting. I've peered into the tomb, the empty tomb...but I haven't see the angels. And...I'm not without a hope. Because I know, the risen Jesus didn't meet everyone at once. This easter morning Jesus met Mary at the tomb...then later on Jesus met those walking...then later on Jesus met those in the upper room...then later on Jesus met those fishing...then a week later Jesus met Thomas...so if you haven't met or seen the risen Jesus this morning, if you haven't felt the Easter joy today; if you're not in a place to embrace

'deep living,' that's alright, instead, hold to hope, hold to 'deep hope', because the Easter Jesus, the Resurrected Jesus visits at different times in different ways.

I feel it's important to name and recognize this, and I believe it's important for us to know, to trust, to hold in faith that the invitation to 'deep' life doesn't go away after Easter, because 'deep' living is more than how we're called to live now, it's how we're called to live from now on.

Even before the pandemic we were being invited into 'deep' life by Jesus. Jesus' call to 'follow me' has always been one of transformation, change, and growth. Jesus' 'follow me' pushes us out of our comfort zone, beyond the boundaries of our imaginations, past what's socially expected. That's likely what was so attractive about it in the first place.

These deep things that we've been invited to into throughout Lent are universal, they are more than things to reflect and ponder during lent, or even during a pandemic, these are things to continue to reflect and cultivate throughout our lifetimes.

Deep relationships are something that we're called to, not just as a faith community, but also as a people of God. These commitments are not just something we do at the time of baptism, but it's a way of life, our 'yes' is our 'yes.'

We seek a wisdom deeper than our own knowledge. In a world filled with opinion masquerading as news, where each musing or thought can be 'tweeted' out as fact, God's deep wisdom sees through, and we are called to reflect that deep wisdom.

We've been called to be a healing community a place where the hurting and broken can find refuge, not a place of pain or burden, something that the church as a whole still needs to work on.

And in all of this we're called to grow. Not just to grow up, but to grow into being God's people. This is a growing into the image of Christ, to embrace Christ's way of living more completely each and every day; it's to embrace a growing that never ends; and it's a growing that embraces the setbacks and failures, and embraces the vulnerability and humility to try again.

And the deep hope that we've been called to is a hope that hangs on God's dream of what could be. It's a hope that sees beyond immediate milestones, it's a hope that carries with it a vision that sustains us; it's a vision that drives us; it's a vision that leads us to make God's dream a reality in, amongst, and around us.

And all of these put together lead us to a deep way of living. A way of living that sees beyond the immediate struggles, it's a way of living with open hands, it's a living that if it does hold, it does so gently. It's a living that doesn't just embrace the human Jesus, but it is a living that sees and believes in the resurrected Jesus, Jesus who is both human and divine; Jesus who visits us in the most unexpected ways, at the most unexpected times. It's a way of living that sets our sights to God's dream for creation.

On this Easter Sunday, Mary has brought us to the tomb. For some of us it was a struggle to get here, for others we're ready and willing to step through and into 'deep' life. The beautiful thing is that this invitation to 'deep' living, is never taken away, it's always there. So that when we're ready, we can walk through the door, we can cross the threshold, we can step over the edge, into life, and life abundant.

Amen