

## **“Call the Midwife”**

A sermon preached by Rev. Rachel Knuth  
Community Church of Sebastopol  
Easter Year C: Luke 24:1-12

I.

Traveling through the 40 days of Lent, the season in the church that leads up to Easter, we as a congregation have been walking through the valleys of the shadows. We’ve considered what it means not to gawk, but to witness pain. We’ve thought about how love cannot be fully realized without justice. We’ve wondered how lavish grace and brazen beauty might be poured out and shared in our world. And we’ve thought about (the manure of the world and) how we might mulch the world’s suffering into our roots to let it change us at our core.

All of this preparation and renewal leads us to this moment— when we hear again the good news of how love and life and compassion triumph over death and places of crucifixion in our world. So what might the Easter story mean for us this day? What do we find when we look for the living among the dead?

Our Bible passage today begins with the women approaching the tomb at early dawn, bringing burial spices. They’re doing this now, but it’s out of order. It was all so rushed— Jesus died in the late afternoon, they had to get permission from Pontius Pilate to bury the body in the first place, and they had to move quickly before sundown, when Passover began. There just wasn’t time to anoint the body of Jesus with the oils. So Luke’s Gospel tells us Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the Mother of James, and the other women return to the tomb that third day. Women in those times had a lot of responsibilities, and two major ones were childbirth and tending bodies after death. So the women enter the cave as experts in the ways of midwifing childbirth and death care. They enter the cave hoping to care for Jesus’ body with all the tenderness they possess, with all the grief spilling out of them.

II.

I am certain everyone here today can relate to the tenderness of wanting to care for someone we love, to prevent them from hurting or alleviate their pain. And because we love deeply we often grieve deeply. Some of you may be carrying those feelings into this sanctuary today, and you are here because you yourself have felt sadness or anguish or dare I say a little bit dead inside. Or because you have felt lonely. Or hungry for life. Some of you are in need of sanctuary. Or are scared. Or

anxious. Or sick. Or dying. But you are here on Easter morning because you want to look for the living among the dead, even now in your own life. So how do we do this? What can this story teach us?

III.

As they stand there, letting their minds try to catch up with their senses, the women are joined by two men in dazzling clothes. We know from earlier in Luke that people who shine like that are touched by God. They ask, “Why do you look for the living among the dead?” It’s a great question. So often we linger in the dead places of life, afraid to leave what is familiar even when we are miserable. But the women are in that sacred space of expansive confusion, so when the dazzling men help them to remember, “Remember how he told you he must be handed over, crucified, and rise again on the third day,” it helps the women come back to themselves. Sometimes we just need a dazzlingly wonderful friend to show up and gently remind us who we really are, and how the thing we’re in the midst of really is painful and hard, and how they love us, and compassion is a way forward. Thank goodness for friends like that.

I have to admit that this week there were moments when I felt disoriented and a bit off-balance. But there were a few things that helped me come back to myself, the way the women at the tomb come back to themselves when they remember the words of Jesus. What helped me was making care calls to church members. It was a smile from a couple of you on our Gardening Team. It was washing some of your feet on Maundy Thursday. Someone sent me a photo of a sign in Healdsburg that said “Just enough grace for today.” I had some dazzling doulas this week. Talking to a new friend at a baseball game. Hearing my neighborhood peacocks call for mates on an early morning walk. Laughing at a funny game I played with my family where you throw foam burritos at each other. Simple acts of care and relationship made me feel more myself and more grounded. That’s what re-oriented me toward life and feeling more myself again. So I wonder, what is it that makes you feel alive? What leads you from suffering into new life? Because that’s where the Spirit of Christ can be found. That’s a place in your life to cherish, to pay attention to, and grow.

There are all kinds of ways new life is being brought forth in our lives and in our world all the time. When we’re in that place of not knowing what’s ahead, when we are in the midst of that ourselves, who is the midwife? Who is mid-wifing us through that pain?

If you haven't been to Sunday School in awhile, just a hint that the answer to questions like that is usually God or Jesus. So if that's who you were thinking might midwife us through pain and into new life, you would be correct! But there is a Psalm, Psalm 22, that helps us answer this question more fully. It's a very moving passage, that actually begins "My God why have you forsaken me?" At the heart of Psalm 22 the poet writes, "It was you who took me from the womb; you kept me safe on my mother's breast. ... since my mother bore me you have been my God. Do not be far from me, for trouble is near, and there is no one to help." When there is no one to help, when sorrow is near, it is the Christ-Spirit of God that leads us into life. Christ, who knows creation and death and resurrection, from the beginning, whose love knows no end, the alpha and omega, in whom all time gets consolidated into one cosmic being. It is Christ who is our midwife between death and new life. The whole Easter story hinges on the fact that the only way we get to resurrection is by dying first. The Spirit of Christ is the one who made that happen two thousand years ago and the one who sees us through that process even now. When we are in anguish, what we can be assured of is, that in Holy Love, Christ makes all things new. Or, as author and founder of House of All Sinners and Saints, Nadia Bolz-Weber once said, "It happens to all of us. God simply keeps reaching down into the dirt of humanity and resurrecting us from the graves we dig for ourselves through our violence, our lies, our selfishness, our arrogance, and our addictions. And God keeps loving us back to life over and over."

Even in our most painful moments we are not alone, and the forces of death do not win.

#### IV.

After the women preach the good news to the other disciples, Peter runs to the tomb. He stoops and looks in. All he sees is the piece of crumpled linen that had been wrapped around Jesus' body. Linen is made from a plant called flax. When the farmers harvest it, they bundle it up to let it dry. They ripple the seeds off to save for planting next year. But probably the most interesting part is that flax isn't harvested like hay. No, the whole plant is pulled out of the ground because the usable fiber goes all the way into the root.

As Easter people, may our lives be usable, all the way to our roots. May we be usable in service to Christ bringing more life, compassion, and justice into the world. May we be grounded in Love, mulched with nourishing compost that helps us grow, and then may our lives speak. Amen.