

Standing, Weeping Running  
Easter Sunday, April 5, 2015  
John 20:1-18  
Rev. Alan Claassen

I went looking for God this morning.

I went looking for God in the transformation of darkness into sunrise.

And cold into warmth, at the amphitheater in Sonoma Plaza,  
with Methodists

I went looking for God in celebrating the Passover Seder with the  
congregation of Shir Shalom last night.

I have been looking for God a lot in the past 46 plus days.

Looking for God when a small group of people worshipped together  
on Ash Wednesday

and experienced the ways in which we are dust and stardust  
and to dust and stardust we will we return,  
but for now we are called to love

I went looking for God with small groups of people and individuals  
who are working together to see that this community of faith  
has its spiritual and organizational house in order and in vitality.

I went looking for God as we worshipped together on Sunday mornings and  
traveled the pilgrimage path of Lent together, stopping by Selma along the way.

I went looking for God in the joy-filled anticipation of Palm Sunday, and followed the courageous act of Jesus when he entered in the city of Jerusalem, as we gathered around the peace pole and laid down our prayers for peace within ourselves, within our relationships, within this world.

I went looking for God as we remembered together here in this sanctuary the last night that Jesus shared with his disciples, when he washed their feet, called them his friends and he gave them and us the commandment to love one another.

I went looking for God at the Community Good Friday service when we sang and prayed and sat in silence together as we focused our meditation upon the cross, wondering where we stood in relation to the cross.

I also went looking for God in the beauty of the Pacific Ocean at Sunset and moonrise and an early morning glimpse of the last phase of a lunar eclipse.

Ever since Lent began 46 days ago, I have been looking for God,  
looking for resurrection.

I do this every year and every year I see something new.

I remember a few years ago, experiencing God during  
the Children's Moment on the first Sunday of Lent,  
at the church I was serving in northern CA.

I said to the young ones that I went looking for God this morning.  
And the clues that I used in looking for God  
were to find something that filled me  
awe, wonder, gratitude.

And I showed them a branch of a tree.  
No leaves yet, no blossoms,  
just the tiniest evidence of a bud,  
that was weeks away from blossoming.

I said to the young ones, this is where I found God this morning.

So I asked them, “How do you think I could see God in this branch with no leaves  
or blossoms?”

What in this branch would make me feel awe, wonder and gratitude?

First response:

Awesome in the buds knowing that they are about to become flowers.

Second response:

I wonder where you found the branch?

Third response:

Thankful that the tree is there in the first place.

Well, that was when I saw God again that morning.

Because that third response,

grateful that there is anything here at all,

is very close to something that Albert Einstein once said.

Albert Einstein said that the most amazing thing that there is in the universe,  
is that there is anything here at all.

So, there I was

sitting on the floor of the church on a Sunday morning  
surrounded by budding geniuses.

So I told them that.

I told them that I was in awe of their responses.

I told them that I wondered what they were going to blossom into.

I told them that I was grateful to be with them.

Thinking back on it a little while later,

I wish I had said, "You must have awesome parents.

And I felt myself get a little choked up then,  
thinking back on that children's moment.

Thinking back on that with those wonderful children

made me remember when my children were young

Now, they no longer run and jump on our bed in the morning to wake up Betsy and  
me.

They no longer run to greet us at the door when we come home.

They grew up.

And I miss there being children.

And then I wondered,

What remains constant as they grow up,  
through childhood,  
through youthhood,  
to adulthood?

What remains is the way that we raised them.

The love that we gave to them  
The confidence, the dreams, the support,  
As best as we were able to give.

And that brings me to this morning, Easter morning.

What remains after Good Friday?  
What remains after Jesus is gone?

The love is what remains.

Just as the love for the child remains in the adult  
So the love of Jesus, remains.

The love that Jesus shared in his teachings and healings remains.  
The love remains with the disciples, the children of God.

The love remains so that we become co-creators with our children,  
with our church friends, with our community,  
in raising another generation of young ones  
who will look for God

We can look for God...

In awe, wonder, gratitude,

In Silence, letting go, grieving

In Creativity, imagination and celebration

In Transformation, building communities of compassion.

And all the while I have been looking for God

I have to remember the one of the messages of Easter

is that we don't recognize it when it is happening.

We think we are looking at the Gardener and it is actually the Messiah.

We think we that we are looking at the end

of our hopes and fears of all our years

and we are actually looking at the beginning of

a new stage of our life journey.

We think we are looking at rejection

and it turns out to be an invitation to a party

we didn't plan.

We think we are looking at failure

and it is actually God's way of getting our attention.

Wake up!

Get up!

Get going!

God loves us and there is nothing we can do about it.

Love, once given and received, is eternal.

Love remains.

God loves us and there is nothing we can do about it;  
except, share it with others and  
keep looking for God in the morning, awestruck  
in the afternoon, wondering  
and the evening, grateful.

The point is to see where the resurrection is happening right now and how it is  
shaping our own lives.

Going back to thinking of my children, Lauryn and Cody,  
As young adults,  
they are alive and well,  
struggling and growing,  
exploring and discovering.

They are taking the love that they received from Betsy and me,  
and their grandparents and friends,  
and they are doing something new with it.

In a similar way, the disciples of Jesus,  
experiencing incredible loss after the crucifixion of Jesus,  
discovered the love that remained within them,  
in the stories that they could share about Jesus,  
in the community that they could build together,  
in the healings that could bring to one another.

We have an incredibly strange idea in the church, you know,  
and that is that we are the body of Christ.  
We are the resurrection.

Resurrection is not something we believe.

Resurrection is something that we see,  
through deep suffering with the eyes of deep compassion  
and the faith the God abides.

In the Gospel of John,

Mary is the first person at the tomb,  
the first to see the stone rolled away  
and the only one to see Jesus.

She went and told Peter and the other disciple about the empty tomb  
and they went to the tomb and saw that much,  
but then they went home.

Mary stayed at the tomb and wept,  
for love, for sadness, for fear.  
Where is Jesus now?

“How can it be that the way of blessing has come to this?  
How is it possible that it has ended here,  
when until so recently it was about being on the path together,  
accompanying one another as you walked into the life that was waiting for you,  
and as you leaned into the dreams,  
the visions, the calling that had been given you?

What now?

Can it be that stillness is a journey, too?

Can it be that waiting offers its own road, one that,  
instead of propelling us forward, spirals us inward?

Is it possible that waiting is part of how a way is made for us?”

Jan Richardson

Mary stayed at the tomb and wept, for love.

She was attended first by angels and then Jesus who asks her,

“Whom are you looking for?”

She doesn't recognize him in his new form.

Jesus calls her by name and then she sees.

Mary held on to her deep love

and her deep suffering

and her questions like a prayer long enough,

that she was able to take another look into the empty tomb.

On this second glance there were two angels who responded to her questions.

And then looking away from the tomb and into the garden

she saw someone she did not recognize but who recognized her.

She heard someone she loved call her by name.

Mary!

Teacher!

Go and tell others what you have seen.

Prayer is sitting still long enough, until we hear “yes”

until we hear an affirmation that speaks to very center of who we are

that calls us by name

that says to us

we can keep going,

keep moving,

keep loving,

keep living.

Mary stood at the tomb,  
she was present, she was standing by the one she loved, ready to care for his body,  
even though the life was gone from it.

Mary stood at the empty, the stone rolled away.  
She stood in the face of her confusion and loss and she went for help,  
and found Peter and the disciple whom Jesus loved.  
They saw the empty tomb and that was enough for them to believe and so they  
went back home.

Mary stayed and wept.  
And in her standing, being present with her loss  
And in her weeping, being present to her sadness,  
And in asking for guidance, "Where have they laid him?"  
She caught a glimpse of ...  
the love that remains.

Mary went looking for God  
and because she stood her holy ground, face to face with death and sadness,  
letting her tears come,  
and then asking for help from  
a gardener,  
Mary found God.  
Mary saw the risen Christ.

I see the risen Christ whenever I hear of someone who faces death and chooses  
life, who refuses to give into the darkness in whatever form it takes, and does  
whatever it is that they can do to bring light into the world.

There is more light than dark in the world,  
but not by much.

We are called to be that much.

Whether we are caring for the well-being of someone we love  
or caring for our fragile planet,  
we can be witnesses to the love that remains.

Let the people say.