

The Sunday of the Resurrection-Year B- The Rev. Jennifer B. Cleveland 3.31.24

Alleluia! Christ is risen! What is on your playlist? You know those behind-the-scenes moments before an athletic event or a big performance, when the camera goes into the locker room or backstage and zooms in on the person who is preparing for their big moment. The headphones are on, the eyes are often closed, the head sometimes bobbing as they do what they need to do to get ready. They are in the zone. Sometimes the announcers know what they are listening to, but usually not. What's on your playlist for different occasions and moods that gets you into the moment?

There are a lot of songs on our Easter Morning playlist. We've already sung a few and there are more to come. Soaring hymns with familiar lyrics, and all the flourishes, bells and whistles are on display this morning, made even better with a glorious choir singing from on high! And there are so many that might be on your Easter playlist that we aren't singing this morning. *Hail thee festival day* and *Now the green blade riseth, The Strife is o'er*—those are a couple of my personal favorites that we are not singing. Singing and music are so central to getting into the zone, if you will, of our Easter celebration.

What a contrast with the gospel of Mark this morning, where not only is there no singing, but there is no talking. It ends in silence. There's that conversation at the start, as the women go to the tomb, *trying* to figure out how to roll away that stone, so that they can say their final good-bye to their beloved teacher and companion. The one who fully saw them and wholly valued them. But then they see that the stone is already rolled away. That concern is solved, but a new one quickly emerges: the body is gone. They hear that indecipherable and alarming message and end up fleeing in terror, amazement and silence. This isn't just the ending of today's Easter reading. This is the original ending of the entire gospel of Mark.

I am caught off-guard by this ending every time. It isn't just the way it ends—in silence and fear, not song—but the fact that it's *these* particular women who run off. Most of the other disciples had fled the scene back on Good Friday, right when things started heating up. Peter, of course, famously denied knowing Jesus at all—not just once, but three times. These women are the only ones who stayed with Jesus every step of the way—through the crowds' violent calls to crucify him, through the tense back and forth between the religious and political authorities, through the death once the crowds had dispersed. They are the ones who saw it all and still stayed with Jesus.

Back in 2020, in the full swing of the fear and isolation of the pandemic, in the midst of deep unrest and division in the country and world, and a collective uncertainty about which way the moral arc of the universe truly bends (towards justice?), Michael Curry, the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, published a book entitled *Love is the Way: Holding onto Hope in Troubling Times*, in which he makes the remarkable and difficult claim that we get stronger even when the burden gets heavier. In an interview with Brené Brown, she flat-out asked him, "How?" He responded, "I don't know *how*, yet I've witnessed time and again in people's lives that the way of love shows us what to do

every time. Following that way of love builds our strength.” (This is a paraphrase from the podcast *Unlocking Us with Brene Brown*, 9.30.20)

That’s the question the gospel of Mark leaves us with. Not *What do you believe about the resurrection of Jesus?* but rather, *Do you believe that love is the way, even when...?* Even when the divisions only seem to be widening and calcifying? Even when the suffering from violence and wars in this world is so heavy and overwhelming? Even when we are grief-stricken? Even when we are deeply, deeply skeptical or cynical (or both) that the power of healing and transformation are stronger than the powers and principalities we see all around us. *Do you believe love is the way even when...?* On their way to the tomb, the women asked a central question: Who will roll away the heavy burden of the stone? Love is the way. The women run off, so Mark’s gospel makes us do our own wrestling. *Do you believe love is the way, even when...?* Time and again, the Easter proclamation is **YES, even when**. Like those women, we, too, are ordinary humans, so we need to reaffirm our Baptismal vows on a regular basis. Church history reflects the struggles and very uneven practices of the followers of Jesus, yet it’s still the only reason why Christian community exists—to live into this proclamation that *Love is the way, even when*.

Every song on the Easter playlist, every alleluia, is a proclamation that Jesus, who became the risen Christ, shows that love is the way, even when. Arguably, the pithiest song on the playlist is one of the oldest: *Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and on those in the tombs bestowing life*. This Easter troparion is possibly from the 4th century. A troparion is a refrain that is repeated over and over again. The Easter troparion is meant to be sung not just with our voices, but with our whole bodies. To love with wild abandon, so as to fully participate with Christ in the trampling down of death, when we sing. This is the Easter song at the heart of our playlist, not just this morning, but day in, day out.

I’d like to give this go, so on the word *trampling*, stomp your feet in four different places, to trample death down not just here (in your heart) or there (in various places in the world), but everywhere. And then, at the end, as a sign of life—and to get the blood in our veins going—there is a double stomp or clap. There is a proverb from Zimbabwe that says, “If you can talk you can sing,” so even those who believe they cannot carry a tune are not off the hook.

Through love and with love and showing the way of love, Alleluia! Christ is risen!