

“Gleam-Flinging Reminders”
Easter Sunday, Year C
April 17, 2022
Presbyterian Church in Leonia

This was supposed to be our first, somewhat “normal” Easter in 3 years, the way we remembered it to be. We were supposed to return to things, as we knew them. It’s our first Easter in the sanctuary in 3 years. We may be more masked. Maybe a bit more battered from more than 2 years of pandemic living. Sadly, we are missing some not sitting beside us. Joyfully, we have some new faces that have grown dear to us, including those watching online. It was supposed to be as close to “normal” this Easter as one could expect in this pandemic. But as we stepped off from that Parade on Palm Sunday, into the next day of Holy Week, that Monday morning I knew something was off. I was starting to feel sick. On Tuesday, a test confirmed it: I had COVID. Turns out, this would not be what I expected or what the church expected, either.

And so this year, I could relate to the grief. The confusion, bewilderment. The surprise. The fear. When the women went into the tomb, the memorial vault, to care for Jesus’ body with the spices they had mixed, as was done for loved ones, **he was not there**. They brought their hearts to the tomb, but it was empty.

I saw some tombs last weekend, when my sister and her family were in town. We visited the Met. Since the last three out-of-town visitors we’ve had in the past 2 years have wanted to visit the Met, this trip ended in a repeat wandering through the vast history of Egypt. My sister and her husband were lingering over each description, savoring the chance to take in the culture. My nephew and daughter, on the other hand, were gallivanting through the exhibit. I played the role of a sheep dog: going back and forth between these pairs, making sure we held some sense of togetherness. But the Mummy exhibit: that was something that held the kids’ attention for more than a few seconds. So I stood near the glass case, watching them as they admired the brightly colored sarcophaguses— these are the painted coffins of Egyptian royalty— and wondered what the kids were thinking as they gazed upon a real mummy. As I was standing near the glass case containing some upright, open and empty sarcophaguses, I noticed that with the way the light was hitting them, I could see a reflection of myself, flung onto the glass so it was projected inside of the coffin!

This provided an excellent way to pass the time while we waited for my sister and her husband to meander through. One at a time, we each lined ourselves near the case so that our reflection would project our image into the open sarcophagus, for an eerie picture, of course.

And while that was all silly fun and games, as I read this gospel passage today, I can see how trained Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, to the tomb were to project death into that space where God has made life possible. I think that is our practice, because that is what we see:

We see the city of Mariupol in Ukraine literally destroyed into ruins last week. In that week between when Jesus paraded into Jerusalem, welcomed with palm branches, to today— just seven days— we have witnessed mass shootings in Sacramento, where 6 were killed and 12 injured; a Brooklyn subway, where 23 were injured and a whole city was struck with terror, and just yesterday a mass shooting happened in a South Carolina mall. These are just the ones that were big news, but the sad truth is that mass shootings happen everyday, and we have come to count on this culture of death each time we accept it; we have even looked for its image upon us, rather than catch and share the gleam-flinging culture of *life* and insist on a better way.

But in those three days, between Friday and Easter, I can imagine that Jesus walked the platform of the Brooklyn subway. I can imagine Jesus crowded in a van with fearful children in a car marked “CHILDREN” trying to escape the violence in Mariupol, or with the elderly still there, too frail to flee. He is at work in those places, resisting the evils of domination and violence, and finding places where— by the power of the Spirit— he can call forth resurrection.

As for the women who visited the tomb, it was not until the two men engage them. Now here the bible translates the men as wearing “shining fabrics,” but I like the original Greek translation, which says, “Gleam-flinging.” Now that alone makes a statement, I’ll say. They call the women to **remember**: “be you reminded how he spoke to you in Galilee, when he said he would be delivered into the hands of sinful men; he would be crucified; and on the third day he would rise again.”

The next verse: “And they remembered his words.” Here, it’s as if they awoke from their slumber and came to their senses, to receive the resurrection news with the joy and wonder— and perhaps, still, confusion— it merits. From the Salt lectionary commentary: “The Greek term for ‘remember’ here — *mimnesko* — means more than just mere recollection; it means something more like ‘to bring past actions to bear on the present, with new power and insight.’ The same underlying word appears in Mary’s Magnificat with reference to God helping Israel ‘in remembrance of God’s mercy,’ and also in the crucified thief’s plea, ‘Jesus, remember me’ ([Luke 1:54; 23:42](#)). It’s a tangible, consequential kind of recalling, a form of remembering that is at the same time a form of action — and for the women at the tomb, it carries the force of an epiphany and a commission: ‘Then they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest.’”¹

There is something about that *memory* of Christ that allows for the faith in new life to be possible. That is why we join Christians around the world, especially on high holy days like Easter, in sharing in the sacrament of Communion. This is a **gleam-flinging** meal that shines upon us the memory of abundant life, of Jesus’ life himself.

Memory is so powerful. As I was quarantining last week, my favorite way of passing my alone hours was watching the Korean show *Pachinko*, a series on Apple TV that is based on the novel

¹ Dawn: SALT’S Lectionary Commentary for Easter Sunday. April 11, 2022
<https://www.saltproject.org/progressive-christian-blog/2019/4/16/dawn-salts-lectionary-commentary-for-easter-sunday>

of the same name, written by Min Jin Lee. The story centers around multiple generations of a Korean family, first in Korea, and later living in Japan, and a short bit in the United States. The subtitles in the show are color-coded depending on which language they are speaking, as the characters slip seamlessly between Korean, Japanese, and English.

When the main character, Sunja, prepares to marry and leave her mother in their impoverished life in Korea, to a different kind of harshness and poverty of Koreans living in Japan, her mother wants to send her with a gift. So she heads to the grain merchant in the market, and asks for rice. He tells her he couldn't possibly sell her rice, but he has some nice barley for her. She insists on the rice. Again, he tells her he cannot sell the rice; he must sell it to the Japanese. But, he offers her some millet instead, his finest. Finally, she *begs* him for the rice, telling him that her daughter is marrying and she cannot afford a dowry; this rice is one thing she can give that will remind her of her home. She leaves with the rice.

We can then see her rinsing the rice, saving its valuable starched water, steaming it, fluffing it. When her daughter Sunja sits with her new husband for their last supper before leaving Korea, she opens the covered dish before her and is overcome to see such a valuable gift her mother has given her. Tears drop onto her chopsticks as she moves the sticky, white grains to her mouth.

Throughout the show, each time Sunja eats rice, there is a gleam-flinging remembrance of the power of that last supper her mother provided, and it grants her survival; it grants her transformation; and it grants her a way back to the ones who loved her so long ago.

This Easter, let's ask ourselves to take notice, and remember, the gleam-flinging signs of resurrection that are all around us, and how very much a part of us God has caused them to be. Let's allow that good news to change us. I don't say this as a simplistic power of positive thinking message. I am saying this with the *life-saving* urgency that God is calling forth something more for you, for me, and for this world we share. I do not know what the trappings of death have done to you, but I know our country is literally sick from them; we rolled the stone closed long ago, and never expected it to budge again.

But what is this gleam-flinging? Kelly Brown Douglass, in her book *Resurrection Hope: A Future Where Black Lives Matter* points us back to memory. "Jesus is calling his disciples to bring a memory of him into their present. Furthermore, this is to be an incarnate memory. For, as he lifts up wine and bread, he says, 'This is my body.... This is my blood which is given to you.... Do this in remembrance of me.'" Through this act," Douglas says, "Jesus is symbolically connecting his incarnate reality to the call to remember. He is asking the disciples to re-embody him... Simply put, Jesus's call is a charge to his disciples to embody in their present their memory of him. Such a remembering would reflect a movement from crucifying realities toward God's promised future."

I know that's a lot to digest from an academic theologian, but let me repeat the essence of it for you: Jesus is asking us through memory to re-establish his body here and now— that is, to

make his presence known and seen in the world around us. This is the kind of memory to which Jesus is calling all those who follow him. This is the kind of memory that allows us to see the living, gleam-flinging presence of Christ on the bodies of young black men. This is the kind of memory that allows us to see the living, gleam-flinging presence of Christ on queer and trans kids in Florida and other states as they are made pawns in political battles. This is the kind of memory that allows us to see the living, gleam-flinging presence of Christ in the needs of our neighbors who are hungry or who cannot make rent. This is the kind of memory that even allows us to see the gleam-flinging presence of Christ land on ourselves, once in a while. Christ is not dead. Christ is right here with us, gleam-flinging to try to get our attention. Will we catch the light of that reflection? And if so, what are we going to do about it?

Christ is risen. He is risen, indeed.