**Whispering Resurrection**

Jeremiah 31:1-6
Matthew 28:1-10

It was 1974. Two students from the University of Arizona had just made a discovery that took their breath away. Resisting every temptation to shout out the news of what they had found, they instantly new a more guarded and careful sharing of their discovery is what was needed. This was no time for loud proclamations.

Gary Tenen and Randy Tufts were cavers, a sub-group of people who have great enthusiasm for exploring underground tunnels and caverns to see where they might lead and what they might find. Cavers often find themselves crawling on hands and knees in mud, squeezing through tight underground holes and tunnels, with only the light from their head lamps to show the way. Michele and I knew such people when we were living in Pittsburgh. I thought they were a bit crazy.

Crazy or not, Gary and Randy, began exploring a sink hole which in turn led them on a 200 foot underground crawl eventually opening up into a huge complex that today is known as Kartchner Cavern State Park in southern Arizona. The Cavern is one of the world’s ten most colorful and varied limestone caverns. It is filled with beautiful stalagmites, stalactites and various rock formations. It is a living cave, which means this million year old cavern is still in formation. As the tour concluded, Michele and I, along with others in our group stared out at a four story formation that had been given the name Kubla Kahn, a name fully intended to reflect the mystery of this amazingly intricate stalagmite and the beautiful cavernous room in which it exists.

Randy Tufts and Gary Tenen had made a discovery that every caver longs to make and rarely do. They were entering a part of the earth on which no human being had ever stepped foot and they were encountering a sight that has been called a subterranean jewel box. Yet, this was no time for boastfully claiming victory. They knew this was something precious and they had a responsibility to protect it from exploitation and careless use that often happens with such discoveries. Resisting the human temptation to yell at the top of their voices, “look what we found”, they slowly began telling only those who they thought they needed to inform so that the cavern would remain protected for generations to come. It took 14 years of whispered discussion and conversation before the Arizona State legislature, largely in secret, approved a bill protecting the cavern as a new state park.

Do you recognize the parallels with this story and our celebration of Easter today? For many folks, perhaps most, Easter is a high energy, high volume, proclamation of victory. But, when you read the Gospels, especially Matthew, Mark and Luke, what we encounter instead are followers of Jesus whose experience seems to be much closer to that of the two cavers, Gary and Randy, than it does to loud sounds of victory that we so commonly associate with Easter.

Included in your bulletin today is a quote from Presbyterian pastor and novelist, Frederick Buechner who states, “It has always struck me as remarkable that when the writers of the four Gospels come to the most important part of the story they have to tell, they tell it in whispers. The part I mean, of course is the part about the resurrection.” In our lesson today, Matthew tells us that when the two Mary’s leave the tomb, following their encounter with the angels; they do so with “fear and great joy” as they run to tell the disciples. No yelling “halleluiah” at the top of their longs, but rather the astounding news of resurrection is given to us in measured whispers, “alleluia”.

The message of Easter is without question one that claims the victory of love over hate, generosity over greed, compassion over callousness, justice over in justice, life over death. This is not our doing. It is God powerfully at work in our world and in our lives. The days of empire domination and oppressive rule from above are on the way out. Matthew tells us the two Roman guards, become like dead men. I picture these representatives of domination with stunned faces, not unlike the faces on the two monkey portraits now hanging in our sanctuary as part of the Art Crawl. It is Matthew’s way of saying, resurrection claims victory over every power that can oppress. Resurrection hope is the assurance spoken of long ago by the prophet Jeremiah, as grace in the wilderness, proclaiming the word of God, “I have loved you with an eternal love.” Stepping into the promise of resurrection is like stepping into a cavern filled with the wonders of creation, discovering anew the mystery of God’s love that ultimately defies description.

When Gary and Randy stepped out from that cave they knew loud shouts of “We found it. Look what we have discovered,” could be counterproductive. Perhaps this is also why the Gospel speaks of resurrection in whispers.

 Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, all of the Gospel writers know they are writing to people whose lives look remarkably unchanged. Rome is still in charge. The powerful still oppress the week. People still suffer loss, illness, death, disappointment. Rather than loudly and boldly claim victory, Matthew along with all the other Gospel writers whisper, “Jesus is not here in the tomb of your disappointment. Jesus is not here in the tomb of your loss. Jesus is not here in the tomb of your despair. Jesus is not here in the tomb of injustice. Jesus is not here in the tomb of racism or any of the many systems of exploitation”. Anyone facing personal struggles and everyone who cares about injustice can tell you it is counter-productive for the Gospel writers to pretend these tombs; these places of human struggle do not exist. On the lips of the angels, Matthew simply whispers, Jesus is not here.

 A central reason Gary and Randy held back on loudly proclaiming their discovery is that they were afraid the wonders and mystery of their discovery would be misused and exploited. They worried about people who would leave trash behind, carelessly break these beautiful formations and leave graffiti on the walls. Sadly we have too often witnessed how Christians loudly exclaiming, “We found it. We have the answer,” has become a means of exploiting and misusing the promise of resurrection. Rather than embrace the assurance of God’s eternal love as a promise for all people and all creation, loud claims of resurrection victory have been used to reassert the dominance of men over women, justify slavery, provide a theological rationale for colonial exploitation, the negation of LGBT brothers and sisters, and the continued abuse of creation. God is on our side, we are the victors, too often has become like graffiti on the mystery of resurrection. Perhaps the Gospel writers intuitively know the risks and dangers of loud proclamations of victory and so they begin with a whisper.

The whispering of resurrection, of course, does not remain in the tomb, where as we have been told Jesus is nowhere to be found. First the angels and then Jesus tell the women go to the disciples and have them meet me in Galilee. Galilee is where the continuing whisper of resurrection will occur. Where is Galilee? As we learn from Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, Galilee is that place where with the whisper of resurrection love the hungry are fed, with the whisper of resurrection love the naked are clothed, with the whisper of resurrection love the sick are provided health care. Galilee is that place where with the whisper of resurrection love we find the courage to stand with Jesus and all the prophets working for the justice of God’s Realm. Galilee is all those places where the whisper of resurrection opens our hearts and our minds in ways we never imagined.

To be sure there comes a time for loud Alleluias, breaking out the tambourines and singing at the top of our longs about the victory of God’s love in our lives and in our world. But, let us always remember, the assurance of resurrection begins with a whisper. You may never make it to southern Arizona and see the wonders discovered by Gary and Randy. But, you are here on Easter Sunday where we are surrounded by the mystery and promise of God’s resurrection love.

**Jeremiah 31:1-6**

*In our first lesson the prophet Jeremiah speaks to the people of Israel whose live have been turned up down by the exile forced upon them by the Babylonian Empire. In the midst of their despair, Jeremiah reminds the people how God had been with their ancestors in the wilderness as they fled from slavery in Egypt. Even in the face of so much uncertainty, the people still found grace in the wilderness. The prophet reminds the people that God loves us with an everlasting love and they will again have reason to rejoice.*

At that time, says the Lord, I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be my people. Thus says the Lord: The people who survived the sword found grace in the wilderness;
when Israel sought for rest, the Lord appeared to him from far away. I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you. Again I will build you, and you shall be built, O virgin Israel! Again you shall take your tambourines, and go forth in the dance of the merrymakers. Again you shall plant vineyards on the mountains of Samaria;
the planters shall plant, and shall enjoy the fruit. For there shall be a day when sentinels will call
 in the hill country of Ephraim: "Come, let us go up to Zion, to the Lord our God."

**Matthew 28:1-10**

*In our Gospel lesson Mary Magdalene and another Mary go to the tomb of Jesus with absolutely no expectation of encountering anything other than Jesus lifeless body. Reminding us that the power of resurrection includes all creation, Matthew tells us the earth itself quakes. Underscoring the mystery of God at work in our world and our lives, angels appear to the women who soon learn the journey they have been on with Jesus has not ended as they thought. It has only begun.*

After the Sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.' This is my message for you." So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshipped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."