

Letting Go

A few months ago Steven asked me to preach on Easter Sunday and part of me was excited, but part of me was also so nervous. I have never preached on Easter Sunday before and if you haven't noticed it's a pretty big deal! However, I of course agreed to preach on Easter Sunday and then I tried to talk myself out of my nerves: I said to myself, '*Roshni you have preached before, what could be so different about Easter Sunday 2020...*'

So, let's get the elephant out of the room! We are on Zoom. We are not in the church. Its different, but let me also be clear: Today is Easter Sunday 2020 and we have gathered together, so let's start this off right...

Alleluia Christ is Risen!

RESPONSE: The Lord is risen indeed Alleluia!

Happy Easter everyone!

For about the last month my husband and I have been living with my parents – being in isolation with my parents is not exactly the first year of marriage we imagined – but it is going well!

Besides working we are all finding things to do. For instance, my mom is going through our old photo albums and there is a lot. She is going through them and getting rid of the physical photos and albums we don't need to hold on to. Now let me tell you, my mom is an efficient woman with tasks like these, but there is one hurdle in her way – my dad. My dad is a pack rat he loves to hold on to things, especially things he never looks at.

I overhear my mom wanting to get rid of photos telling my dad “we don't even know who the people are in the photo,” and my dad responding, “no keep them it could be someone important”! Meanwhile my husband and I listen in to what I will call enthusiastic conversations, and the two of us just sit wondering how long it will take us to turn into them. Who will be the efficient organizer, and who will be... my dad?

Today in the Gospel of John, Mary Magdalene wants to hold onto more than just photographs and albums of memories. On what we call Easter Day, Mary Magdalene wants to hold onto her Lord, she wants to hold onto Jesus.

In the Gospel of John, we do not hear about Mary journeying with Jesus and the other disciples. We do not hear about Mary's devotion to Jesus, or about how she cared for him and the other disciples. Up until today in the Gospel of John we do not hear Mary and Jesus interact with one another at all.

What we do hear is that Mary Magdalene was one of the women who stood near the cross when Jesus bowed his head and gave up his spirit. She was there when he died, watching. And after he died, early on the first day, in the dark, she journeyed to his tomb. And from there over and over and over – throughout the gospel that we had beautifully proclaimed for us this morning we really hear her say one thing:

“They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.”

After seeing Jesus killed, after he is buried, it appears that all Mary wants is to know where he is. To be with Jesus wherever he was laid: Maybe to anoint his body as it says in the other gospels, or maybe just to sit with him. We don't quite know why, but all Mary Magdalene wants is to hold onto Jesus.

We like Mary can also have a desire, a longing, to hold on to things. To hold on to ideas. To hold on to people. What are you holding on to right now? Any photographs?

What are you holding on to?

Hearing this question in the gospel as we live in the midst of COVID-19 is particularly timely. There are many things that I wish to hold on to right now, things I long for that sometimes seem like distant memories.

I hold on to the thoughts of connecting with my family and friends (even the ones that bug me!), some of whom are alone themselves.

I hold on to the idea of connecting with all of you in person. The thought of celebrating the risen Lord by sharing the peace, by gathering around the altar, seeing all of you outside of the confines of these little zoom boxes. I hold on to the image of when we can open our doors the way we used to, and any person could come in to be fed, in all matters of speaking.

I hold on to the times where people felt safe, or even just safer than they might right now. I was at the grocery store in line to pay and an older man in front of me dropped his case of Ginger-Ale, and the box popped open and the cans just spilt everywhere on the floor. I instinctively stepped away from my cart to help him gather them together and had to stop myself. I wasn't supposed to touch his belongings, I wasn't supposed to touch him, I wasn't even supposed to be close to him. Instead I had to watch him as he picked up all of his cans one by one, and he looked over to me and I just mouthed the words 'sorry'. He nodded back knowingly, it felt so awkward and kind of lonely, but at the same time what we both knew needed to be done.

I want to hold on to a lot of things right now that a month ago I did not even give an intentional thought to. In this time as you celebrate Easter what do you long for? Like Mary Magdalene, what are you desperately trying to hold on to? Is it Jesus too?

"They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him."

Mary Magdalene says this, or conveys a version of it, three times in today's gospel. The final time is to someone she supposes to be the gardener, and actually she is a lot more direct with that supposed gardener. She tells him that she will take Jesus' body, it's what she wants to hold on to even for just a bit longer.

We know it is not a gardener she is speaking to. And eventually Jesus, her teacher, her Lord, tells a weeping Mary, *"do not hold on to me"*. Mary has been running around all over the place, journeying back and forth to the tomb. She has been through so much, especially in these last three days. Even though all Mary

wants is to find comfort, to hold on to the one that she has lost, Jesus tells her to let go because he has more to do. She has more to do.

He tells his tired and brave follower to go to the others and share what she has seen, what she has heard. Jesus tells her to let go, and she does. That is how you know the story. That is how I know the story. That is why we are gathered here today, to hear *our* story.

When you hear a really good story, or when you watch a really good movie, what do you want to do right after? You want to hear it again, watch it again. Over and over again, because it is just that good!

You likely come back to hear this Easter message every year. It may be proclaimed in new and creative ways, especially this year, but you come back for the same message. To hold on to it one more time, and that is OK. It is OK to hold on to our story. It is OK to hold on, to yearn for moments with our families and friends, and our communities. It's OK to yearn for what is normal. It is OK for that to ground you, what else could ground you?

Still, today we are called to hear that Jesus tells us, like Mary, to let go. Do not hold on so tightly to what you long for that you cannot see what is happening around you. Do not miss the past so much that you cannot be thankful for the present, and have the will to change the future.

We are not going to Zoom forever. We are going to be gathered with our friends, our families, our communities, our church one day. It will be a spectacular celebration, with Redeemer no doubt there will be all the bells and whistles and perhaps even a bouncy castle! It is OK to miss these things, to long for them, to hold on to the memory of them.

However, when we return, we returned changed. We return knowing how much we, and all vulnerable people, rely on each other, our neighbour, for safety and support. We return telling ourselves we will now truly appreciate what we have longed for. We will return thankful for all those who have cared and protected us.

And hopefully (this is the big one) we return to move forward. To see who you and the Church can be post COVID-19; because God has so much more to do, and we have so much more to do. Perhaps in some new ways, but always grounded in what we have to hold on to, our story in Jesus who is risen.

So today, this Easter Sunday 2020, as we hear this great story that we hold on to again let us be like Mary. Let it ground you, let go, and let us boldly announce to the world that you have seen the Lord.

Alleluia Christ is Risen!

RESPONSE: The lord is risen indeed Alleluia!