

“Before You Even Call”

Isaiah 65:17-25; John 20:1-18 – Rev. Rebecca Littlejohn
Vista La Mesa Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), La Mesa, California – April 17, 2022

Holy God, bless the speaking and the hearing of these words, that we might find hope and solace in the presence of the Risen Christ. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Time is a funny thing. We've known this for years, of course, but since the pandemic set in, it's become harder and harder to avoid. How many weeks – or was it months – ago something happened, what year such-and-such occurred, even and perhaps especially what day of the week it is – lately it seems my brain struggles to know these things automatically like it used to. And even though celebrating Easter this morning probably makes clear that today is Sunday, Easter itself doesn't make time any less confusing.

“I am about to...” says God in Isaiah. Did you? Or are we still waiting? Even this week, the sound of weeping is loud in Jerusalem. Houses that were built have been demolished rather than inhabited. If you're “about to,” God, maybe get on with it already?

“Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark,” John writes. Did Mary know what day it was? Was it really Sunday for her, or had she been up all night, such that it still felt like the longest Saturday ever, and not in a good way? Did she realize it was “three days later” – which was only true if you fuzz up the counting anyway – and did she remember that that was supposed to mean something?

And here we are, celebrating as if Jesus just emerged from the tomb, when we've known the story for 2000 years. And yet, even though we supposedly knew it was coming, there is part of us that is still trapped in the shock and horror of Saturday evening. There is much that is not yet resurrected in our lives. It can be hard to feel like Easter is really here. That's why it's important to remember that time is funny. Easter invites us to experience time differently than we do when we're going to work or school. It's not about which hour follows which or what day something is scheduled. God doesn't follow those rules.

We are in that same moment that Mary was in when she was weeping in the garden, because our hearts are raw and tender like hers. This is a moment that arrives in our lives repeatedly, often unexpectedly but sometimes not. We can spend years in that moment that was "early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark." Pre-Jesus-sighting Easter, we might call it.

We started Lent off with the idea that the two years of pandemic we've endured have worn us down. Having lost much of what brought our lives stability, we have lost some of our capacity to live in ways that honor our beliefs and convictions. Temptations grew stronger, as our will to resist was weakened. We likened it to a wilderness journey, one that had no signposts or water stations or even a clear end. If we're exhausted and fearful, that's no surprise. But as we journeyed, we discovered that the wilderness also holds blessings, not the least of which is that having our normal crutches pulled out from beneath us pushes us to lean on God in

ways we never anticipated we'd have to. Last Sunday, we talked about how one of our greatest temptations is to try to save ourselves, rather than crying out "Hosanna! Save us!" to God. And now, here we are, the worst has happened, and what is the promise we are given?

"Before you call, I will answer. While you are yet speaking, I will hear." Before Mary recognized Jesus, before he called out her name so she could cry "Rabbouni!", he was risen; he was present. This pre-Jesus-sighting Easter moment is not Jesus-less. Perhaps we are about to rouse ourselves enough to cry out. Perhaps we have found the energy to weep some more. Perhaps we've even managed to get ourselves up and out to go looking. Jesus is already there, already risen, already desiring to call us by name so our souls can be flooded with relief and joy. Whether we're out in the garden frantically asking everyone if they've seen him, or running back home in confusion, or hiding out in our beds still because we can't face the gaping absence that grief has forced upon us, Jesus is there. Indeed, whether we recognize him or not, Jesus is there. Risen, wounded, intimate, loving, Jesus is there.

Time is funny. It can both be Easter and not be Easter all in the same moment. It can be Easter and Good Friday at the same time. You can be about to call out to God or nowhere near ready to try, and Jesus is there either way. Before you even call, God is there to hold you – in your weeping, in your railing, in your sighs too deep for words. Even as our hearts are overwhelmed by the pain and loss in our own lives and around the world, we hear God saying "no more shall the sound of

weeping be heard.” Even as we struggle to understand why there is so much suffering around us, Jesus calls us by name and our breath catches, for we have been drawn home into the arms of God. Before you even call. In the midst of our distress, God is there – waiting to emerge, already present if not yet recognized. Time gets especially funny when it seems like everything is happening at once. And that’s just it. Today is Easter. It’s also Good Friday and Holy Saturday and Palm Sunday, and that one Tuesday in Lent when the journey seemed simultaneously impossible and unavoidable. God is present before we think to look. Christ is risen while we are still weeping. God is about to and God already has. Before we even call, God has answered. And God will keep answering, even when we don’t have the capacity to cry out. God does not follow the rules of our time or even the rules of life and death. Whether we are weeping or rejoicing, Christ is risen. Christ is risen indeed! Hallelujah and Amen!