

What is Easter's Invitation to You?

Friends, long-time and new, let's begin this time of reflection with prayer. God of all, be with us now as wonder what invitation you are extending to us this Easter – invitations to each of us and to our congregation as a whole. Encourage and embolden us in new ways today so that we might more fully embody your resurrection. Amen.

Beloved people, what is Easter's invitation to you? This question was inspired by the reading we have just heard, paraphrasing portions of Psalm 118. We heard this: *"You, O Loving Presence, have been my strength, You have stood beside me in the darkness, You have walked with me into the light!"* This psalm is well known as a song of praise to our God of steadfast love – love that is with us in times of darkness (foggy darkness, stormy darkness, nurturing darkness) and love that remains with us as we shift into times of light (the light of clarity, the light of release, the light of bold action).

We also hear this from the Psalmist: *"I give thanks to You, O Beloved, who answers our prayers and **invites us to new Life.**"*

On Easter, we celebrate that a God we know as Steadfast Love invites us to new life – invites us to rise again and again with Jesus. We know **THAT** Love invites us to rise again and again. Today we have an opportunity to wonder **HOW** God invites us into new life. Who will offer us lessons about how to respond to God's invitation to new life?

In this morning's gospel narrative of that first Easter morning, Jesus' disciple Peter, Jesus' disciple John, two angelic messengers, Mary of Magdala, and Jesus each teach us a lesson about how to access resurrection power and how to make it more accessible to one another.

How does **PETER – the disciple whom, despite all his foible and foot-it-mouth moments, Jesus considered his rock – THAT Peter –** invite us to new life? We heard:

*“[Mary] told them, ‘The Rabbi has been taken from the tomb! We don’t know where they have put Jesus!’ At that, Peter and the other disciple **started out toward the tomb.** They were running side by side, but then the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first... **Then Simon Peter arrived and entered the tomb.**”*

Peter was eager, bold and brave. Hear again these words: *“Peter and the other disciple started out toward the tomb... Then Simon Peter arrived and entered the tomb.”* I think we know which one of the two men said, ‘let’s go – now!’ Act first, review later. We can look to Peter when we find ourselves needing to get up the nerve to say what needs to be said, do what needs to be done in the face of injustice, unkindness, or worse... apathy or despair. **I wonder, who is your modern-day Peter – a friend or family member who models eagerness, boldness and bravery to take the next right step into new life?**

How does **JOHN – the disciple who felt so very loved by Jesus – THAT John –** invite us to new life? We heard:

*“Peter and the other disciple started out toward the tomb. They were running side by side, but then the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. **He didn’t enter, but bent down to peer in and saw the linen wrappings lying on the ground. Then Simon Peter arrived and entered the tomb. He observed the linen wrappings on the ground, and saw the piece of cloth that had covered Jesus’ head lying not with the wrappings, but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the disciple who had arrived first at the tomb went in. He saw and believed.**”*

John was careful, observant, and mindful. Hear again these words: *“He didn’t enter, but bent down to peer in... Then the disciple who had arrived first at the tomb went in. He saw and believed.”* We can look to John when our heart is racing, we are confused, we are afraid we might misstep. John took time to be fully present to the jog to the tomb and to each emotion and thought he experienced as he arrived, paused at the threshold, took a breath, and saw what he would see. **I wonder, who is your modern-day John – a friend or family member who models careful, observant, mindfulness before taking the next right step into new life?**

How do **THE ANGELS** who held sacred space for death and grief – **THOSE angels** – invite us to new life? We heard:

“Meanwhile, Mary stood weeping beside the tomb. Even as she wept, she stooped to peer inside, and there she saw two angels in dazzling robes. One was seated at the head and the other at the foot of the place where Jesus’ body had lain. They asked her, ‘Why are you weeping?’”

The angels were quiet, gentle, and peaceful. Hear again these words: *“One was seated at that head and the other at the foot... they asked her, ‘why are you weeping?’”* The angels held gentle space for Mary to be with her grief. Once they sensed that Mary knew they were with her, they invited her to share her pain with them. **I wonder, who is your modern-day angel – a friend or family member who models spacious, gracious, gentle presence before taking the next right step alongside you into new life?**

How does **MARY OF MAGDALA** – the soul friend whom Jesus never disregarded as less than himself for any reason, **THAT Mary** – invite us into new life? We heard:

*“Meanwhile, Mary stood weeping beside the tomb. Even as she wept, she stooped to peer inside, and there she saw two angels in dazzling robes. One was seated at the head and the other at the foot of the place where Jesus’ body had lain. **They asked her, ‘Why are you weeping?’ She answered them, ‘Because they have taken away my Rabbi, and I don’t know where they have put the body.’”***

Mary of Magdala was unselfconsciously true – true to herself and true toward others. No wonder Jesus trusted her companionship, possibly more deeply than companionship he shared with any other person. Mary could be counted upon to express her emotions and care straightforwardly. Hear again these words: *“They asked her, ‘Why are you weeping?’ She answered them, ‘Because they have taken away my Rabbi, and I don’t know where they have put the body.’”* Mary of Magdala embodied the Irish proverb: *“dance as if no one were watching, sing as if no one were listening, and live every day as if it were your last.”* **I wonder, who is your modern-day Mary of Magdala – a friend or family member who is true enough to themselves and others that they are also able to serve as a mirror for you, drinking in the truest self you are brave enough to share with them and reflecting your beauty back to you?**

Finally, friends, how does **JESUS – God’s anointed bearer of Christ light, lover of our souls** – invite us to new life? We heard:

*“[Mary] turned around and caught sight of Jesus standing there, but she didn’t know it was Jesus. He asked her, ‘Why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?’ She supposed it was the gardener, so she said, ‘Please, if you’re the one who carried Jesus away, tell me where you’ve laid the body and I will take it away.’ **Jesus said to her, ‘Mary!’”***

Jesus sees and trusts the imprint of a loving God in himself and with every other one whom he encounters. Hear again these words: “*Jesus said to her, ‘Mary!’*” Jesus sees and trust the imprint of a loving God in each of us today, calling us by name. **I wonder, through whom is Jesus reaching you today? Who is one friend or family member who sees and trusts the very best, loving ways you are and encourages you to see and trust the best in yourself?**

At our sunrise service this morning, we heard and wondered about words from poet Jan Richardson, in her collection *Circle of Grace: A Book of Blessings for the Seasons*. In a piece entitled “The Magdalene’s Blessing: For Easter Day,” she shares the following words of blessing. I invite you to close your eyes if you are comfortable doing so and to lay your hands – palms up and open – on your lap as you receive this Easter blessing:

*“This is an invitation,
a choice,
a threshold,
a gate.*

***This is your life
calling to you
from a place
you could never
have dreamed,
but now that you
have glimpsed its edge,
you cannot imagine
choosing any other way.”***

Here again these words: ***“This is your life calling to you from a place you could never have dreamed...”*** What is the unexpected place, who is the unexpected person, what is the unexpected challenge or opportunity through which new life is calling to you?

Friends in faith:

May you know a **Peter** who will model for you an eager, bold, and brave way of being.

May you know a **John** who will model for you a careful, observant, mindful way of being.

May you know an **angel** who will model for you a quiet, gentle, peaceful way of being.

May you know a **Mary of Magdala** who will model for you an unselfconscious way of being true to yourself and to others.

May you know **one like Jesus**, who sees and trust the imprint of God in you.

May we move into new life together. Resurrection Love is counting on us.
Amen.

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Psalm 118: 1-2, 14-24; John 20: 1-18