

Alleluia! Christ is Risen!
The Lord is Risen Indeed, Alleluia!

This is the night, when we remember how God brought our fathers,
the children of Israel out of bondage in Egypt.

This is the night, when all who believe in Christ are delivered from the gloom of sin.

This is the night, when Christ broke the bonds of death and hell,
and rose victorious from the grave.

This is the night.

We began tonight with the kindling of the Holy Flame. Light emerging out of darkness, filling the space between us. Radiant, glowing, not static but vital with movement as flame and air inter-mingle. We began with light as we called forth the presence of the Holy into our midst. As we followed the light of Christ into our sanctuary, we prayed that Christ might be a light unto our path, and a lamp unto our feet, illuminating our way, always and forever. A blessing unto us.

In the radiance of Christ's light, we were invited to listen and receive the sacred stories of God and God's people. Stories that told of how God brought forth creation and humanity, and then came to the aid of Israel, liberating them from their exile in Egypt, calling them to cross over and rise up as God's chosen ones. We heard how God cleanses and blesses Israel, transforming their hearts from stone into flesh, and God's message of hope, redemption and restoration. Each of these ancient stories tells us about who God is, and about who we are in relationship with God: These are the stories of our ancestors, and they are ours too.

And tonight, the sacred story continues. Christ is Risen! And we celebrate his holy emergence from death into life. We would expect on Easter to hear of Jesus' resurrection, And we do. Yet nestled inside of this gospel we find the stories of the women, and of the disciples – human stories that we can relate to.

Stories do matter. And tonight's gospel is one of those stories. Mary, Magdalene and Johanna consumed in their grief now find themselves at the center of Jesus' story as it unfolds. It was Jewish custom that women would come, spices in hand, to anoint and prepare the body for burial. And on this day, it was their honor to offer this blessing to their friend and Lord. That is how they imagined the story would go.

But then, the story changed. The stone is moved, Jesus is missing. The story doesn't add up.

It is into their confusion and distress that a new context for what they are experiencing is offered. "The one you seek, the one you came to anoint is not here", they are told by the

two men, “He is Risen!” And then, before they can dig in to the rush of thoughts and emotions they must be experiencing, the angels call them to remember. Remember, they said, how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again?

All he had told them suddenly comes rushing in. And they remember his words. They remember Jesus. And in that moment, their memory of Jesus is a blessing.

In the Jewish tradition, when a person dies, it is common to offer this phrase: May his memory be of a blessing, or May her memory be a blessing. In times of overwhelming, immediate contact with death, these words comfort those who mourn and honor the memory of those they mourn. It is a kind of blessing that extends a wish, that when the living think about the one who has died, they may do so with warmth and joy – and, it offers the possibility that the life of the dead may serve as a blessing, marking the way that life has mattered and continues to matter in this world, even if they are no longer in it.

The angel’s call to remember might be paraphrased, “May his Memory be a blessing”, for when they were able to recall what Jesus had said, that memory replaced any doubt they had with wonder and awe. So much that they had to proclaim it, had to share it with the disciples. Luke reminds us later that when Jesus appeared to the disciples on the Road to Emmaus, it was not until Jesus revealed the scriptures to them, that they could comprehend what had taken place. “Were not their hearts burning as he opened the scriptures to them? (v 32) It is these stories of Jesus that will sustain them, and us. Because stories matter.

Knowing our story and how it intertwines with God’s gives a sense of who we are, and whose we are. We all desire to know how we came to be, and our deepest longing is that we are beloved.

When my nephew was about three, each night as my sister tucked him into bed, he would ask her to tell him the story. What story, she asked. THE story, Mama, you know. And she did. The story he longed to hear over and over again was the story of how he came to be. How his father and mother had met, fell in love, married, and how happy they were to learn that they were going to have a baby – going to have him. Sometimes the details of the story varied: what foods she craved, how they chose his name, how long he took to arrive, and how they cried as they held him in their arms, so filled with love. What was always constant, though, was the truth and love expressed. That this sweet boy was beloved, always desired, and a gift from God.

On this night of nights, as we proclaim and celebrate the Lord’s resurrection, may the words of Jesus be as a blessing to you. May you find in them strength and hope. May they always remind you of who you are, and to whom you belong. Let us go forth into the world in Joy, singing Halleluia, Halleluia, Halleluia!