

Easter April 16, 2017 - A Meditation on Hope Psalm 118 (selected) Luke 24:1-12

When I was a child, my father used to say, "The early bird gets the worm!" I would roll over thinking, "Who wants a worm." So, I understand the disciple's prone position, as this morning's gospel story begins. I get those who continue to dream, as the women slip out into the fresh open air of the early morning.

And so it is that while the men sleep in dread the opening of their eyes, the women stand astonished at what their eyes behold: the stone rolled away from the entrance to the tomb where Jesus had been lain, and the tomb empty, except for a few grave cloths left behind.

And then there are the two dazzling men asking, "Why do you look for the living among the dead?"

The women have been travelling with Jesus and the disciples and providing for them out of their own means. They have been faithful to Jesus since he touched their hearts and mended their spirits. They stood at a distance watching as he was crucified, and again as he was laid in a tomb. So, as they walk toward the tomb, on the dawn of that resurrection day, their intention is to be faithful in their final acts of care for his body.

In yesterday's Soujourner's on-line Magazine, Jim Wallace writes that on that first Easter morning, the women at the tomb become history's midwives of hope—and in so doing reveal to us that we too are called to be — midwives of hope.

The kind of hope he is speaking of is not simply a feeling, or a mood, or a rhetorical flourish; rather it is a choice, a decision, an action based upon faith. Hope, Wallace argues, is the very dynamic of history; the engine of change; the energy of transformation. Hope is the door from one reality to another. Things that seem possible, reasonable, understandable, even logical, in hindsight — things that don't seem at all extraordinary to us — often seemed quite impossible, unreasonable, nonsensical, and illogical when we were looking ahead to them.

The changes, the possibilities, the opportunities that no one or very few would even have imagined, just become history after they've occurred. What looked before as though it could never happen is now taken for granted.

When the women return from the tomb to share with the disciples what they have seen and been told, the disciples call it nonsense.

"Hope unbelieved," says Wallace, "is always considered nonsense. But hope believed is history in the process of being changed." The nonsense of the resurrection becomes the hope that shakes the Roman Empire and establishes the Christian movement. The nonsense of slave songs in Egypt and Mississippi become the hope that lets the oppressed go free. The nonsense of same-sex 'unions' in the 80's transforms our understanding of humanity and the bonds that create a true marriage today. The nonsense of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission moves our nation forward toward a more compassionate and just relationship with our indigenous peoples that will one day be taken for granted and assumed to be only right.

This is also how personal transformation takes place. We can't imagine ourselves different than we are today or healed of that which binds and afflicts us.

We can't imagine ourselves forgiven. But when we walk through the door of hope, and we look back at where we have been and where we are now, we see evidence of God's grace.

For Christians the Resurrection is the door of hope, and Jesus shows us that the resurrection comes by way of a cross. Suffering and hope are always joined in human history. The cost of moving from one reality to another — in our personal lives and in history — is always great. But it is the only way to walk through the door of hope.

History depends on those who are willing to walk through that door, those who live and act and even die in hope for the sake of a better future which they know by faith is coming —and by so doing, open the door for all the rest of us.

On Easter morning we stand on the shoulders of those whose first testimony is called nonsense, even as we too make our declarations of hope!

God-given dreams are often considered nonsense by those who want us to, “get real.”... by those who benefit from the way things are. The truth is that it is not nonsense to believe that weapons of mass destruction are not necessary, and that war is not inevitable. It is not nonsense to believe that a child's race, socio-economic class, gender identity, or sexual orientation will not always determine their future share of happiness and well-being. It is not nonsense to believe that we who have been divided from each other can, and will, one day sit down together at the welcome table of God's love and grace.

With Easter eyes, we can look into the faces of our children and believe there is a future for them. And we can look into the eyes of the poor, the suffering, and the dispossessed and believe that God is able to establish justice for all. With this hope we can envision a world finally no longer able to live without justice and mercy as it's defining qualities. Then we can plan and sow and create visions and dreams, and we can find the faith and the courage to bear the cost of such possibilities.

“Why do you look for the living among the dead,” the dazzling men ask, “He is not here! He is risen.”

The parts of sermon focused on ‘hope’ are largely an adaptation of a reflection by Jim Wallace, President of Soujourner's, and published in Soujourner's on-line magazine on April 14, 2017.