Easter Sunday

March 31, 2024

To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.

It’s all about God’s time.

From our Palm Sunday Gospel, while Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table, a woman came with an alabastre jar of very costly ointment of nard; she opened the jar and poured the ointment on his head. Jesus said: “She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial.”

It was God’s time for the preparation.

We missed a lot by not reminding one another of the details of Jesus’ last hours among us in the reading of the Passion Gospel on Palm Sunday: the dinner party at Simon the leper’s house, the Passover meal, the time spent in the garden of Gethsemane where his loyal followers could not stay awake, his betrayal by Judas and subsequent arrest by authorities, his mock trial where most had already condemned him, Peter’s denial, the crucifixion and Jesus’ last breath.

Were you there when they nailed him to the tree?

Perhaps last Sunday was not God’s time for us to hear that account.

My life these last 6 months has been standing on its head, with my husband receiving God’s call to serve as Music Director at St Stephen’s, Middlebury in September of last year: much to our chagrin, it seems to have been God’s time for us to leave our permanent home, our nest of nearly 20 years. Storage space rented, house sold, house bought, contractor with team of workers coming off a cancelled job appearing, seemingly out of nowhere. And then the broken rib which prevented me from putting myself forward for a church assignment; apparently God wanted me to take time out in the desert.

And here we are this Easter Day, bursting at the seams with our Alleluias.

Again from our Palm Sunday Gospel: A certain young man was following Jesus, wearing nothing but a linen cloth. They caught hold of him, but he left the linen cloth behind and ran off naked. What an eerie detail for Mark the Gospeler to include. What is that all about?

And again: Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome were looking on at a distance, waiting for God’s time.

According to our Easter Gospel this morning, those same three women waited for the sabbath to be over, procured the proper spices for burial, and early on the third day went to the tomb, ready to perform their task of preparation for burial. The conversation centered around “how do we get in there to do our work? the stone blocking the entrance is way too big for us to move.”

When they arrived at the tomb, it had been opened, the stone rolled away and a young man, dressed in a white robe sitting there told them not to be afraid:

Fear not, Mary, you will conceive and bear a son; do not be afraid.

Fear not, shepherds, you will find the babe, wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger; do not be afraid.

Fear not, says the young man: for that Jesus – the one you know is crucified and dead – has been raised from death and is on his way to Galilee, just as he told you he would be. Remember? he told all of you – the disciples, Peter - that this was going to happen sometime in the future. You are in that time now. It is God’s time for all of this to unfold. Don’t be afraid. Tell everyone.

One cannot help but wonder if this young man, robed in white, might be the same who fled after leaving his white linen cloth behind, when it wasn’t the right time. But now it was God’s time: someone rolled away that stone.

This was not the time for the Marys and Salome to anoint Jesus’ body, since it had already been done. The woman who interrupted the dinner party earlier in the week had anointed Jesus’ body so that it was ready when Joseph of Arimathea wrapped it linen and placed it in the tomb.

Were you there when they laid him in the tomb?

Don’t be afraid. Jesus of Nazareth wants you to tell everyone. It’s God’s time. Go tell the disciples; tell even Peter who is hiding in shame after denying Jesus. This is not the teaching-preaching-healing Jesus, who tells us not to reveal his actions to anyone because his time had not come. Now, in God’s time, we are encouraged to tell everyone that this Jesus who was crucified, died, buried, is now risen from death.

Were you there when God raised him from the tomb?

So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them. And they said nothing to anyone. It was God’s time, but they were afraid: no one will believe us, they said.

They were afraid….. and yet they were amazed: fear has a way of closing doors, even slams them shut; amazement flings open doors and windows to imagination, to hope, to endless possibilities. Mark’s story ends here, open-ended. My faith tells me those three women chose their amazement over their fear, and by the time they had reached home, they had told everyone they met: the Lord is risen! Messiah lives! God is with us! Christ is alive! The Lord is indeed risen!