



April 12, 2020 • Easter Sunday  
Matthew 28:1-10  
The Rev. Emily Williams Guffey

Once when I was deep in grief over the loss of a friend and I was struggling to keep up with regular life—appointments, meals, sleep, workouts, work—a friend listened, and said two things to me:

The first was: “It is okay to be sad.” When I heard this, I realized how much I had been minimizing my feelings, ignoring them, trying to shove them down just to try to get through the day. But by receiving that validation of my feelings, I actually felt that to minimize them was not to be true to myself, nor was it to be true to those around me. I had to *feel* my feelings, and it is okay to be sad.

The second thing was this: “It is okay to be sad and...” After the “and,” it was as if there was an ellipsis, a void, a silence. The ellipsis was not filled for me. The tomb was empty, as it were, and in that emptiness, in that void, I heard:

It is okay to be sad *and* to keep moving. It is okay to be sad *and* to take steps. It is okay to be sad *and* to exercise. It is okay to be sad *and* to embrace the beloved and the true. It is okay to be sad *and* to look for a new normal. It is okay to be sad *and* to walk forward, albeit on a path that I did not expect. It is okay to be sad *and* to know that sadness is not the end of the story—not for me and not for you. It is okay to be sad *and* to know that joy is bigger than sadness, and life is bigger than death.

In the gospel that we just heard, when the women outside of the empty tomb hear the message that the angel has brought to them, I had to laugh at their reaction because it is just so true—it is a laugh of recognition, of solidarity. The women felt both “fear and great joy” (Matthew 28:8 NRSV). How true is that? Of course they felt both fear *and* joy!

I remembered leaving the hospital several years ago with a newborn, my heart swelling with more joy and love than I had ever imagined *and* my heart swelling with fear. Like, “they’re going to let me out with this newborn? But I have no experience! What do I do now?” I was crossing a threshold...a threshold, a boundary of life that we call birth.

And there is another boundary of life that we call death. At both, we feel complex feelings. We feel both grief *and* comfort at the loss of a loved one — comfort that they are out of pain, comfort in the reception of care from friends, comfort in knowing, trusting, sensing that they are in the fullness of life and presence of our Lord. When we grieve, we are sad *and*.

When we live our faith, when we look for Jesus, we are sad *and*. A characteristic of a faith based on resurrection is that it encompasses all of these feelings. It holds in tension and it brings together, simultaneously, both fear *and* great joy, both terror *and* comfort, both exhaustion *and* anticipation, both the intimate *and* the utterly unknown, both the well-worn *and* the new, both the seen *and* the unseen.

When we walk by faith in the newness of life, when we dare to put one foot in front of the other toward Galilee in hope of seeing Jesus (Matthew 28:10), we do this specifically in the midst of sadness, and grief, and loss. We do this specifically with our hearts swollen with the sense of how *big* love is, for grief is simply a feeling of how *big* love is.

When we are called to walk in newness of life, when we are called to look for Jesus resurrected, we are called specifically when we are sad...*and*...willing to walk. We are called *not* when things are tidy, we are called *not* when we are well-rested, we decidedly are *not* called when we feel like it. Nevertheless, and specifically then, we are to go and to look, and *that* is when we will see resurrection.

When we are grieving, when we are overwhelmed, when we are terrified, we put one foot in front of the other and look for Jesus. We are sad *and*. To look for Jesus, to follow Jesus, is to be sad *and*. We are sad *and* that is exactly when we walk in the newness of life.

Now, our city, our country, and the entire world are experiencing quite a lot of grief. We are shrouded together in death; that is what we are seeing. So it is specifically at this time, on *this* Easter morning, *specifically now* that we look for resurrection.

And we remember how Jesus lived his life. Our Jesus was one of utter and complete love, and from that love flowed a confrontation of systems. Remember shortly before his death, Jesus was overturning sales tables in the temples. He eschewed greediness. He would not tolerate self-centeredness.

In our community, our city, our country, our world, might Jesus' death and resurrection bring to light for us any systems or rhythms or routines or characteristics of normal, regular life that actually were not working? That actually, if we follow a new path looking for Jesus, the resurrected Jesus, to Galilee, we would not pick up again?

Might Jesus's death and resurrection bring to light for us those systems and rhythms and routines that were not actually lifting up the dignity of every human being? For it is a

characteristic of grief and of death to bring to light what is real and what is true, and collectively we are experiencing grief and trauma. One has called the time that we are now in as, in one sense, “The Great Pause”, a great pause of examination. And when we emerge from it, what systems do we embrace?<sup>1</sup>

The tomb is now empty, our streets are empty, our beloved church building, even on this glorious morning, is empty. Jesus is *not* in the tomb, and we are, for many reasons, sad, lonely, isolated, overwhelmed, disoriented, exhausted, grieving...*and* we walk together in a new life, for Jesus, the Christ, is risen.

The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!

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<sup>1</sup> Julio Vincent Gambuto, “Prepare for the Ultimate Gaslighting”, <https://forge.medium.com/prepare-for-the-ultimate-gaslighting-6a8ce3f0a0e0>

Accessed April 11, 2020.