

Easter Year A
The Rev. Emily Richards
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Midwives of Hope

Today as we join the chorus of Christians throughout the world proclaiming triumphantly the power of the resurrection, we remember that this week our Jewish sisters and brothers recalled the story of their own freedom through the celebration of Passover. It seems especially meaningful when Passover and Easter are observed close together because these two great stories are deeply connected. Both declare that through God's great love for God's people, we have been set free from the darkness of our enslavement to suffering and sin and death and we have been called to embrace a new hope. On Tuesday, the first full day of Passover I received an article from a friend about a reading that can be included in the Seder meal, the primary feast of this religious festival. It was co-authored by none other than the Notorious RBG- no, not some rapper, but Ruth Bader Ginsburg, one of the Supreme Court Justices. Ginsburg includes in the retelling of the Passover the story of five women: Moses' mother and her two midwives, his sister, Miriam and Pharaoh's daughter Batya who all in their own way defy the orders of Pharaoh ensuring Moses' survival and the people of Israel's survival even at the risk of their own.

Ginsburg writes, "On Passover, Jews are commanded to tell the story of the Exodus and to see ourselves as having lived through that story, so that we may better learn how to live our lives today." "The stories we tell our children," she says, "shape what they believe to be possible— which is why at Passover, we must tell the stories of the women who played a crucial role in the narrative. The Book of Exodus, much like the Book of Genesis, opens in pervasive darkness. In Exodus, darkness attends the succession of a new Pharaoh who feared the Israelites and so enslaved them. God alone lights the way out of the darkness in Genesis. But in Exodus, God has many partners, first among them, five brave women...These women had a vision leading them out of the darkness shrouding their world. They were women of action, prepared to defy authority to make their vision a reality bathed in the light of the day."

On this very morning as a new day dawned women weighed down by grief at what they had witnessed only days before went to the grave of their beloved friend. They had believed him to be the Messiah, their new Moses leading them out of oppression and suffering into a life of freedom. Instead they had stood at the foot of a cross and watched helplessly as he took his last breaths. Sitting outside his tomb, with this image seared in their brains a frightening, otherworldly messenger appears. Matthew paints the most dramatic picture of the resurrection in all the Gospel accounts –an earthquake, guards falling over like dead men due to fright and an angel with lightning appearance rolling back the stone to reveal its emptiness. What’s remarkable, maybe even more remarkable than some fearsome angel, earthquake and empty tomb is that the women actually believe the message that is told to them. When things get difficult and scary and god awful, when they seem to be at their absolute worst, when everyone else has fled or is in hiding, it’s the women who step up, the women who are bold enough to take the risks. Like their brave sisters before them, bathed in the light of this new day and bathed in the light of this new reality they go and tell. Amid their fears and grief and doubts they not only show up at the tomb, but then go and tell their brothers of this unbelievable, shockingly good news.

“Without women preachers we would have no knowledge of the resurrection,” theologian Jurgen Moltmann contends. According to an African proverb, “If you educate a man, you educate an individual, but if you educate a woman, you educate a whole nation.” First among the partners of the risen Christ are the women disciples. And then through their proclamation the other disciples become apostles, sent out to share this new reality with the world. On this brilliant Easter morning as we too are bathed in the light of a new day, these women become for us the primary witnesses of what we and all other followers of this crucified and risen Lord are called to be - midwives of hope.

In a world where things are often not as they should be, where chemical weapons are used by a government to kill its own citizens, many of whom innocent children, where bombs explode under the pews of the faithful worshipping on Palm Sunday, where neighbors must choose between buying food or paying for much needed medication, where illness, addiction, depression or divorce leaves you feeling isolated and alone, where the death of a precious loved one leaves you broken-hearted resurrection hope

offers us a way to see and know things as they are intended to be. Life is stronger than death. Love is greater than hate. Compassion overcomes judgment.

The message of the resurrection does not take away all the women's fears and it will not take away all of ours. Rather, it enables them and us to be bearers of the good news despite our fears and doubt and grief. This is what it means to be midwives of hope. I believe that the gospel gives us the ability to keep our feet steady among the tumult of life and not just to persevere but even to flourish when life seems overwhelmed by the darkness. Again, words from Jurgen Moltmann, "Believing in the resurrection does not just mean assenting to a dogma and noting a historical fact. It means participating in this creative act of God... Resurrection is not a consoling opium, soothing us with the promise of a better world in the hereafter. It is the energy for a rebirth of this life. The hope doesn't point to another world. It is focused on the redemption of this one." Resurrection hope gives you and me the courage to not only embrace God's promise of a better world here and now, but the courage to participate in it. We are called to become partners with the risen Christ, not some passive bystanders, invited to be God's joyful companions – to say "yes" to life in all its brokenness and beauty, and to rejoice in the miracle of birth and rebirth.

This Easter morning, we stand on the shoulders of those women who were given the news of the resurrection first. Through their bravery, we are inspired to carry on their witness, to tell and retell this incredible story to all who need to hear that death does not have the final word, that the darkness will be overcome. On this day and every day, may we gaze into the faces of our children and grandchildren, and believe there is a future for them shining brightly in the light of the resurrection. Alleluia! Christ is risen indeed! Do not be afraid. Go boldly, friends, and tell this great message. Be midwives of hope for the sake of the world. Amen.

