

Postures: Life

2 Corinthians 5:14-21

While it was still dark.

While it was still night.

While she could not see.

While she thought death held sway.

While she grieved.

While she wept.

While it was still dark, resurrection began.

“He is risen!” “He is risen indeed!” A beautiful, glorious Easter morning to all of you here in this room and to those of you who are joining online. Our Lord has the Risen. The tomb is empty. Death has been stripped of its power. Resurrection is our new story. Praise God. The poem that just read is called “While it was still dark,” by Jan Richardson.

Over the course of Lent, we’ve been examining stories from the gospels of the “postures” that people have taken towards Jesus when they have an encounter with him. Because how one stands, how one approaches someone in their words, actions

and body communicates an awful lot. In college, I studied theater, and one of the things we spent a lot of time on was body work. That is how a character moved, walked, stood and just generally held their body. In one production, I played a character who was supposed to exude confidence and quick assurance, so I put my shoulders back, and I lengthened my stride when I walked. Or in another instance, my character was a flighty, nosy person. A pair of vintage high heels, and everything about how I moved changed. How you move, how you approach the world says a lot about you.

Or perhaps you've experienced the incongruence of talking to someone on the phone or by email and you form an image of them; what they look like in your mind, only to be completely surprised by what they look like and act like when you meet them face to face.

In the Gospel accounts of Jesus' crucifixion, death and ultimately his resurrection, many people encountered the son of God, who was different than they ever imagined. A prophet who didn't conform to their understanding. An all-powerful God who chooses weakness. A beloved teacher, now a body, needing to be prepared for burial. Let's visit together some of those encounters, where people thought Jesus could and should take a certain posture; when they expected a different Jesus than the one they got.

In Matthew 26:47-56, Jesus is in the Garden of Gethsemane, praying for release on his journey to the cross, yet also praying that the father's will be done. And a large crowd, with clubs and swords, ready to fight this Jesus. Ready to take this so-called Son of God by force, and Jesus gives himself up. No fight, no struggle, one of the disciples,

ready for a fight, rightness and rage burning inside of him, swings a sword, cutting off the ear of the high priest's servant. There's hollering, there's blood, and Jesus says, "Put your swords away. Do you not think I could call down angels? But I will not." And reaches, and heals the man's ear. While violence lay in wait, ready to spring out, Jesus spoke peace.

In Matthew 27:11-14, Pontius Pilate, who holds the power to set Jesus free or send him to the cross, says to Jesus, "Do you not hear the accusations that the priests and elders are bringing against you?" But Jesus gave no answer, not even to a single drummed up charge that was brought against him. While the world demanded an answer, more words to shout into the void, Jesus offered secure silence.

So Pilate hands Jesus over to the guards to be crucified, they strip him of his clothes, put a crown of thorns on his head, beat him with cane, saying, "Prophecy! Who hit you?" While the guards demanded an omniscient prophet, ready to spout answers, Jesus held still.

Hung on cross, arms stretched wide, two convicted criminals on either side of him. One of the men beside him, belligerent, desperate, calls out to Jesus, "Are you not the Messiah? Save us and yourself!" Jesus gives no reply, but the man on the other side speaks for him, "Do you not fear God?" We are getting what we deserve, but this man has done nothing wrong!" He asks Jesus to remember him when he comes into his Kingdom. Jesus replies, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise." While a criminal demanded rescue, Jesus offered solidarity and grace.

Each person who met Jesus on the road to Calvary, had an expectation of who Jesus should be. And time after time, Jesus defies that expectation. And it's maddening. Why doesn't Jesus behave like we expect him to? Why isn't Jesus more like us? Why did he take no posture of defense, of power, of might? The answer to this question is not about why he didn't choose the expected, but about what posture he chose instead.

Jesus chose the path to the cross, because Jesus chose radical love for all of humanity. Love for offenders and victims, love for the rich and and poor, love for the powerful and the powerless. Love while...love while we were far off, were angry, were mired in sin. Love while things are broken, love when the story did not turn out the way we wanted. This is ALWAYS, ALWAYS, ALWAYS the posture of God towards us; love. Deep, whole hearted, redeeming love. God's posture to us both now and forever.

Like most kids who grew up in church, the first bible verse I memorized was John 3:16. This verse is quoted so often, printed on so many items, rattled off with such immediacy that the wildly beautiful theology of it was something I lost touch with. Four years ago, when my grandmother died, that was the verse read at her funeral, because it was her favourite. And it was in that room, surrounded by the red eyes of my parents, aunties and uncles, siblings and cousins, in a room where death felt like such a thief, that I heard that verse anew. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him will not perish, but have everlasting life." Repeat.

It was love that led Jesus to the cross. It was love that held his arms wide. It was a love

that caused the earth to shake, ripped the curtain of the temple in two, and for love that Jesus, one more time, defied our expectations of him, and rose from the dead. For love that light broke through the misty, morning fog of our humanity.

“Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.” Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes.

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to

him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"; and she told them that he had said these things to her."

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While she thought death held sway.

While she grieved.

While she wept.

While it was still dark, resurrection began.

This same love that Jesus showed, that Mary knew is for us too. The same love meets us outside the dark tombs in our lives. That same love says our name. That same love that calls God our father, and our God. We too have seen the Lord, the one who loved us all the while and through all the "whiles" "You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for an unrighteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But

God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.", that's Romans 5:8-11

Not only does God's posture of love towards us meet us exactly where we are, this love also redeems us. It calls us beloved, says that we are worthy, and that changes our relationship with God, with people, and with the world. That is the place where the journey of discipleship, of walking with the God who meets us in our whiles begins.

When Taylor's younger brother got married almost 9 years ago, my beautiful sister-in-law walked down the aisle to a song entitled Beautiful Things by a worship band called Gungor. The chorus goes like this, " you make beautiful things, You make beautiful things out of the dust, You make beautiful things, You make beautiful things out of us, You make me new, You are making me me" That chorus has always stuck with me because God is business of making things new, things beautiful. Making us new, making us beautiful. And when we walk down the aisle, so to speak, to Jesus who loves us, we are being made new. Yet, like any starry eyed couple, standing on the threshold of life together, we don't know what that love will ask of us, what that love will cost us, and how that love will change us. Because it will. He is risen! He is risen indeed!

I'll close this morning with another Poem from Jan Richardson, as a reminder that like Mary, we cannot stay at the empty tomb. God's posture of love compels us to go out, to offer that ministry of reconciliation that Carrol spoke about in our scripture reading. The light has broken upon us, Sisters and Brothers, and now we must step forward into it.

Risen

For Easter Day

If you are looking

for a blessing,

do not linger

here.

Here

is only

emptiness,

a hollow,

a husk

where a blessing

used to be.

This blessing
was not content
in its confinement.

It could not abide
its isolation,
the unrelenting silence,
the pressing stench
of death.

So if it is
a blessing
you seek,
open your own
mouth.

Fill your lungs
with the air
this new
morning brings

and then

release it

with a cry.

Hear how the blessing

breaks forth

in your own voice,

how your own lips

form every word

you never dreamed

to say.

See how the blessing

circles back again,

wanting you to

repeat it,

but louder,

how it draws you,

pulls you,

sends you

to proclaim

its only word:

Risen.

Risen.

Risen.