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What a Journey We Have Taken to Get to This Day

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What a journey we have taken to get to this day

I mean, of course, our Holy Week journey

From Jesus' "triumphant" entry into Jerusalem last week on a donkey – when cloaks and palms were laid in his path to bless the road on which he traveled

To the dinner in the upper room with his friends and disciples where he washed their feet, gave them a commandment to love as he had loved them, and solidified his radical meal ministry by instituting Holy Communion and claiming "this is my body" and "this is my blood, do this in remembrance of me"

Then on to his betrayal and arrest, his trial and his torture, his crucifixion and his death

And then the long day of Holy Saturday, the long in between time of waiting and watching

Finally we come to this morning when Mary, heavy with the agony and grief of all that has transpired, all that the disciples have experienced, heads to Jesus' tomb while it is still dark

Wrapped in a cloak to keep warm in that early-morning chill, her head is down as she continues to think through all the details of what has just occurred, and, then, from yards away, she notices what she didn't think could be possible: the stone is rolled away

What is at first thought to be more bad news (grave robbers) turns out to be the genesis of a new day, dawn breaks – Jesus is risen!

My my, what a journey we have taken to get to this day

I mean, of course, our Holy Week journey – but I also mean our own life journeys

Our own Holy Life journeys, nevermind just a week

The ups and downs of Holy Week are played out on repeat in our own lives: the highs and lows, the joys and the griefs, the thanksgivings and the laments

Each of us has journeyed through so much to get to this day: diagnoses of illness, cancer, dementia, disease; broken bones, broken relationships, broken dreams; struggles with fertility, vitality, ability, and mentality – our own experiences of betrayal and arrest, trial and torture, crucifixion and death

moments when we've felt enclosed in our own tombs of despair, loneliness, hopelessness, and fear

I know because, as your priest, many of you have told me your stories

And I know because my own journey has these themes, too

My, what journeys we have taken to get to this day

This day, when the stones of our tombs, like the stone on Jesus' tomb, are rolled away

When the Risen One says “not just me, you, too” and the promise of resurrection is ours to grasp

Today when, as Rebecca Lyman, Professor of Church History emerita from The Church Divinity School of the Pacific in CA and an Episcopal priest

puts it: “The places that we knew were empty of hope are filled with divine presence, and the world as a whole has been remade new.”¹

The places that we knew were empty of hope are filled with divine presence and the world has been remade new

That is the promise of resurrection we grasp hold of today – that is the life-giving, world-transcending power of the stone rolled away and the empty tomb

The promise that even our worst days are not our last days, the worst circumstances are not the ends of our stories

Our stones are rolled away by the love and grace and mercy and hope of God and Jesus’ resurrection lets us boldly proclaim: “not just him, but us too!”

Why are you bringing up our wounds, Amanda? Can’t we just celebrate Easter in joy?

To this, Rev. Lyman writes: “These places in ourselves that we avoid are exactly where God makes a home. What we consider to be tombs of our buried hope and dreams become the gardens of God’s renewal. The sharp realities of suffering, death, and grief are essential to the continuum of love and joy at Easter; their very darkness is what causes the light of resurrection to dazzle.”

“To celebrate Easter,” she says, “is to know that the cross can be the tree of life and utter despair can yield to joy.”

Because our worst days are not our last days, and the hardest of circumstances are not the ends of our stories

¹ <https://www.journeywithjesus.net/Essays/20110418JJ.shtml>

Even in death, we are promised eternal life by the one whose tomb was empty

So often, the story of Jesus' resurrection is interpreted narrowly on just that last bit – about what happens for us when we die

But, those of us who have lived life know that we die many times in our lifetimes

That's not to belittle the final death we experience but to give proper weight to the things in our lives that have been so, so hard to live through

And so I, we, you need to know that resurrection is a promise for you now as much as it's for you in the future

That the places that we knew were empty of hope are today filled with divine presence and the world is being remade new

It may be today, or it may still be yet another day, when you will notice that your stone has been rolled away

Hope lives

Love lives

Grace abounds

Our stones are rolled away

Alleluia! Jesus Christ is risen today!