

## Easter Vigil, Matthew 28: 1-10

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In the predawn darkness, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary walked to the tomb and walked off the map of the previously known world. They didn't need GPS to get them to the tomb; they knew where to bring their spices and oils. After all, they had just been there not long ago watching the guards roll the stone up to close the tomb. But when they arrived it must have felt like those old sea-faring maps upon which mapmakers drew as far as they knew and then at the edge of the map wrote, "Here be dragons." We don't know what happens next so, here be dragons, or maybe: here be an angel accompanied by earthquakes and lightning. Here be something new, and that new thing is as frightening as it is inviting.

[As an aside, though relevant I think, dragons are actually a pretty good stand-in for angels. If you're interested, google "biblically accurate angels." It's not all chubby babies with wings and pre-Raphaelite robed, young men. While we don't really know what they look like, descriptions from the Bible make angels seem more extraterrestrial and unnerving than aquiline noses and gossamer wings. It makes sense that if you always have to start conversations with "Do not be afraid," then maybe your looks are an issue. Another biblical translator actually renders their greetings as, "Please stop screaming, it's going to be fine."

But again that's an aside, and] encountering the fantastical angel and the blinding light aren't even the most fearsome part of leaving the edge of the map. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, like so many of us, believe that they've reached not just the end of the map, but the end of everything. The one they followed, and invested in, and hoped for, and adored was beaten and executed. The world met Jesus and his radical love, and the world said no. The world said no to him, and in his death the world said no to Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, the world said no to the other disciples, the world said no to wild mercy and forgiveness and justice and love. On Friday it looked very much like the end of the road, the end of the map, the end of everything.

I know that feeling, maybe you do too? That place where you can't even imagine a next step, the place where it's just about impossible to see anything other than a dead end. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary aren't coming to the tomb expecting a new next chapter; their expectation, the very ability to expect anything more from this broken world, drained out of them with all that transpired on Friday. They are coming to the tomb to finish the end of the story, literally to wrap things up, fold up their maps, and bury their beliefs. Have you been there? Yeah, me too.

The glorious reveal of this Easter story is that what we think is the end of the story is not the end of God's story. When all seems lost, so much so that maps themselves seem useless and decorated only with fantasy creatures and no real direction, the Easter story shows us untold and unknown worlds and a vast expanse of new possibilities waiting for us beyond the edge of all that we thought we knew.

"The angel said to the women, 'Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified.'" But the old map you were using won't help you find him. "'He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay.'" Here be something new, an empty space, uncharted territory. Here be wonder and mystery and hope and a world beyond your expectations. "'Go quickly and tell his disciples, 'he has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee, there you will see him'... So, they left the tomb

quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them and said, 'Greetings!' And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him."

Trusting only the old familiar paths might have gotten Mary Magdalene and the other Mary trudging to Galilee, but those ways would not have found them running to embrace the resurrected Christ. They have to put down their plans for the end and stop following the well-trod route and look up into the bright and strange world that is revealing itself to them in this bizarre and beautiful moment. Not being cowed by predictions of dragons nor by the appearance of angels, the women are able to keep moving forward long enough to see that the end of the road is actually an almost unbelievable turning point.

And the whole point of telling this story and of retelling all the old stories tonight from the formless void to the Israelites at the edge of the sea to the dry bones is to bolster us and to remind us what a poor sense of direction we have, and have always had. We keep following the voices of no of the world. We are prone to thinking it's the end, that the edge of the map means we're done and finished. It's true that the world gives us innumerable reasons to throw up our hands and quit. Tonight, we, like Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, are invited off the edge of the known world, the world of human-sized plans and ideas, and ushered into a world that God imagines. A world of yes. As such, God's world of yes has no bounds, no edges, no preconceived ideas about what is and what is not possible. The world of resurrection is a world of surprise and delight; surprise and delight most especially for those for whom a sense of wonderment has drained away.

Whether we have paper maps in our car glove compartments or a trust in the Google nav voice or even our own intrinsic sense of orientation, the Easter story of resurrection, of beginnings after endings, of life beyond death, of yes, interrupts our journeys and calls us to look up from the map or the trail and to look around at an amazing sight unspooling in front of us. Even on the way to our old hometown of Galilee or driving around our familiar neighborhoods, when we look up, we will see the strange appearance of Jesus beckoning us to come with him into an impossible world of courage and joy.

There are no permanent dead ends, no forever stalled lives. We might feel we are at a precipice with no way forward, yet the promise of this story is that even if we wander, groping for a time, there is a boundlessness to the love and mercy of God, an endlessness to the horizon. We imagine the edge or the end guarded by dragons, but those are angels telling us to look around and see that this is not the end, and so this is not where we have to stay. In some ways, this invitation is just as fearsome as a mythical sea monster, it requires some boldness and at least a little bit of faith to say yes when the world says no. Moving forward, like Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, into the unknown when we are still scared, and especially when so many are shouting to turn back and to give up altogether, leaving the tomb behind and heading out is an act of profound trust and hope. This is our yes to all that could still be true.

Tonight, we are reminded there is another way ahead, a reason to keep traveling, another unfolding stretch of territory yet to cross. The promise is that here be the risen Jesus, here in the unknown wilds looking fierce and ready, and the promise is that we will navigate unexplored terrains together.