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King's Chapel Midweek  
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# Resurrection Story

## Lectionary Texts: Matthew 28:1-10

*After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, 'Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified.'*

In this story, it is as though the laws of nature have been eclipsed by other laws—an earthquake shakes us to our knees, light radiates from a messenger sitting on a stone. The dead man is not dead, the living men paralyzed by fear, are more inanimate than the the corpse they guard. Transformative change is at work in every sentence of this narrative. From the beginning of the first verse to the end of the tenth, we are brought into a world in which nothing will ever be the same.

“Go quickly and tell his disciples, he has been raised from the dead...” By telling stories, we structure our experiences in a way that gives them meaning, and which allows us to share that meaning with others. We have heard many stories this last week—the stories of Holy Week that culminate in the drama of the Passion, as well as stories told by survivors and witnesses of last year’s Marathon bombings, stories of gratitude, hope, resilience, and strength. I stood near the finish line Monday afternoon witnessing agony and triumph in a rush of feeling—moved to tears by the courage and struggle of the thousands who again have taken on Boston’s race. I was once told that all great stories shed light on the quiet power of transformation we might otherwise fail to notice—a power constantly at work in us and around us, though this power of transformation is harder to miss in some moments than others. Today, we have heard one of humanity’s most powerful stories of transformation—more like this year’s marathon than last year’s. Standing at the tomb in our imaginations with Mary Magdalene and the other Mary at dawn on the first day of the week, we too become witnesses of agony and triumph. *Suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow.*

Once we are in the story, nothing will ever be the same. The first time I heard the resurrection story, it was not a scriptural version I heard, but rather a simple distillation of the important points, easy to plant and impossible to uproot. I was a tiny child at the time, and once my heart was filled with this story, I skipped home from vacation Bible school to tell my family the good news: a talented man named Jesus had been killed, but it wasn't permanent like the markers you can't erase—he came back to life, was still around, and he was willing to be a friend to anyone who needed one. This story is the greatest gift—carrying this story with us, we have something to give again and again, to anyone who needs it, no matter how poor we feel. Most of us, here in New England, tend to get squeamish about exuberant, heartfelt evangelisms. We tend to experience people who want to share their unsolicited religious beliefs with us as intrusive and aggressive, frankly, rude. But there is often earnest (if misguided) generosity in evangelical gestures, a generosity our own defensiveness keeps us from recognizing. My first few years in Boston, I volunteered at the finish line with the Boston Athletic Association and was amazed to find out that marathoners finish the race, some collapsing and dehydrated, some in extreme pain, and they thank the person standing at the end. Amazing—to have given everything and still to be able to give thanks. This spirit of generosity is the best of Boston—when Bostonians have something really good, they want to share it with others. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary couldn't keep themselves from running to share the news. It's that good! Who can't love Easter?! Isn't it your favorite holiday? All lights and flowers, new life, Alleluia's? And it doesn't last just one day... Easter is a season that lasts for seven whole weeks. Once the story is in us, nothing will ever be the same.

My own exuberance for the Easter story flagged as childhood gave way to adolescence. The story was tarnished by absurdities of overly concrete interpretation, by the irreconcilable conflict between the real finality of death as we experience it, and the refusal of this finality expressed by the resurrection. I grew shy and kept the story to myself. It was another gift to me when, years later, I heard the story in a different voice. A South African minister preached on Easter Sunday that it does not matter whether this story is real or metaphorical... it is where the meaning of the resurrection points us that matters. It is the road we take from the tomb, from despair, back into the world that matters. All the runners in our Boston marathon this year showed us on Monday the way of the resurrection—It is a refusal to cower in fear, paralyzed in the face of death or life; the way of the resurrection is the way of resilience, of hope, of joy.

*He is not here; for he has been raised. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, "He has been raised from the dead," This is my message for you.' 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 worshipped him. Jesus said to them, 'Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.'*

We are an Easter people, and this is an Easter season. As we traverse the way of the resurrection, as we tell the story, transformative change is at work in us and around us. The seeds of gratitude are growing and taking root. We are giving and still we are becoming more generous. We are, in spite of politeness, filling up with exuberant joy, becoming the messengers, running, running and telling the story, running and giving thanks and unexhausted. Nothing will ever be the same.