

Look around you. Everyone you see here right now, everyone you see when you are in church or gathered in Christian community at other times, we're all here because of the people in this story ... Mary Magdalene, Simon Peter ... the unnamed disciple "whom Jesus loved."

These are the first Easter people.

We are here celebrating Jesus' victory over the cross and the tomb because these first Easter people began telling the story. At some point they got over all the confusion, trauma and uncertainty they surely felt in the wake of Jesus' arrest, humiliation and unjust execution on an oppressor's cross. At some point they even wrapped their minds and faith around that confounding empty tomb and the fact that Jesus really did rise from the dead, just as he said he would. At some point they felt the ground beneath their feet become solid again.

And they started telling the story.

And here we are. Isn't that incredible? All because Mary and Simon Peter and the unnamed disciple "whom Jesus loved" – those very first Easter people – began to tell the story, just as we do today, and hopefully as each of us will continue to do when we leave this celebration of the Resurrection of our Lord.

I see us in another way through the actions of these three people. My son Max and I were Dwelling in the Word on this text as I was preparing for this reflection. And we saw in Mary and Simon Peter and the unnamed disciple "whom

Jesus loved” diversity in the ways they come to the empty tomb ... diversity we too experience in the ways we come to Jesus and our belief in him as the Risen Christ.

We begin with Mary. She goes to the tomb early, repeatedly and emotionally. She is the first disciple who starts to find words to tell the story. “I have seen the Lord!” and she told (her colleagues) what Jesus had said to her. “I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.” (John 20: 17, 18).

She reminds me of those among us who come into our Christian faith early in life, who come back to it repeatedly ... even when it seems like everything is futile, even when we might neglect our faith for periods of time. She reminds of those of us who come to know Jesus in emotional and personal ways; those of us who might be called “very spiritual,” who tend to feel our faith as much in the gut as in the heart.

And then we have the unnamed disciple, “whom Jesus loved,” who outran Simon Peter and got to the tomb first. He wasn’t so hasty to enter the tomb before the others got there though. Once Simon Peter went in, he followed and when he saw “the wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head rolled up in a place by itself,” (v 6-8) he believed what Mary had said in the first place.

“They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him!” (v. 2)

He reminds me of those among us who come into our Jesus-following ways because it sets us on fire, and pushes us ahead to seek our own limits and then the ones who will teach and accompany us as we go even farther. He reminds me of those among us who get into this Christian community thing because it’s the right or good or expected thing to do, only to find that it changes and baffles us more than we ever expected. He reminds me of any of us because it is the unnamed disciple “whom Jesus loved,” and so, *could be* any of us.

Last and certainly not least, we have our faithful friend Simon Peter. He runs to the tomb also, and at a steady pace. He led the way into the tomb. He was the first to all the grave clothes tossed to the side, yet he was silent as he investigated the scene, and remained so as they returned to their homes.

He reminds me of those among us who have grown and matured in our Christian identities, steadfast and sure in our discipleship within the faith community and in the wider community of which we are part. He reminds me of those of us who are not quick to jump to conclusions, who want a little more time to consider our belief ... or our disbelief. It reminds me of those of us who see the signs and are starting to realize this is really happening, Jesus really is the Redeemer of the world come to defeat death and anything else that wants to stake a

claim on us, and there is so much freedom and grace and life in that realization ... but ... “what if I’m not worthy?” we may sometimes wonder as we, along with Simon Peter, hear that cock crow in the recesses of our memories.

Each of these first Easter people give us rich and relatable metaphors to consider. Most of us probably relate to more than one of these examples. The ways Mary and Simon Peter and the unnamed disciple “who Jesus loved” come to the tomb are like some of the ways in which we come to the belief that Jesus Christ is our only sure and perfect Lord. Some of us come to that belief early, repeatedly and can feel it in our guts. Others of us come to it with fire and zeal, and some hesitancy. And still others, strongly, steadily and stoically.

And you know if we looked at others of these first Easter people in similar ways – like perhaps Mary the mother of Jesus, Thomas or Judas – we would find other rich and relatable metaphors for how we come to our belief in the Risen Christ – some ways kind of surprising, maybe not be deemed worthy by the world’s standards, like being poor in Spirit and meek, doubtful or suspicious; even a traitor.

But there are many ways to the empty tomb and it’s Easter! – the celebration of the Resurrection of our Lord! And the Good News is Christ is risen for all and shines with all God’s glory and forgiveness and healing on the whole of creation, no matter how we come to the tomb ... no matter how we come to our belief.

Thanks be to God; thanks be to the horrific event of the cross and the glorious revelation of resurrection.

And so, hear this blessing upon you, Easter people of 2021, who for a lot of other reasons, may feel confused, traumatized and uncertain, confounded, and like the earth below our feet isn't always so firm:

May God who creates and recreates you with each Easter Sunday make you shine in that Divine Love like a city on a hill that cannot be hidden.

May the Risen Christ make you confident in your freedom from sin and even death, so that you may live out the true self you are meant to be.

May the Holy Spirit continue to bring us into Christian community, inspire us to praise our steadfast God and love one another as Jesus loves us – no matter how we come to the news of the empty tomb and our belief.

Look around you, Easter People! And go tell the story with your mouths and feet, in the name of the Creator, the Savior † and the Agitator.

Alleluia! Christ is Risen! **Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!**

Amen.