

Let It Be

“Don’t hold on to me”, the risen Jesus says to Mary Magdalene, “don’t cling to me, don’t grab me.”

In other words, “let it be.”

And in those three words is the secret of peace and joy and salvation.

We modern folks come to this morning so often with a million things on our mind, with plans and goals and needs and desires.

How to get that next promotion, or where’s the money for my retirement coming from, or how do I deal with that obnoxious co-worker sitting two desks away?

Our lives, it sometimes seems, are filled to the brim with trying to control people, places and things; all for the best of reasons, all with the best of intentions.

Even our faith over these last many years often succumbs to these same temptations.

We have created a religion that all too often is about following the rules, or reducing our faith to good manners or to conforming with culturally acceptable notions of morality.

It’s no wonder that God and Country becomes the rallying cry for those who loath the immigrant and who fear anyone who is different.

But this is not the faith that Jesus brings.

The faith that Jesus brings is centered on those words Jesus speaks to Mary in the garden: let it be.

That Jesus invites us onto a path of releasing fears, anxieties and control is shown to us from the very beginning.

It begins with Mary's "let it be," spoken to the angel who announces that she shall bear the Messiah – an unwed, poor, young woman, who risks social shame and even death by stoning, if she agrees to this astonishing announcement.

"Let it be" she replies.

12-year-old Jesus remains behind the traveling pilgrims to go to the Temple in Jerusalem, only to be confronted by parents worried sick at his whereabouts, and when they find him and scold him with relief and exasperation, he replies: "let it be, I'm doing my Father's business."

And then there are the parables, those strange tales that at first glance seem to be cute stories, but sit with them for a while, and they will turn your soul inside out, parables about precious seeds thrown wildly on all kinds of ground, desperately needed coins lost, then found, prodigal children lost, then found, by prodigal parents – let it be.

These stories challenge our sense of right and wrong, our notions of justice and injustice, as he tells of weeds and wheat growing together, of good fish and bad hauled up by the same net; of those who work the whole day long being paid the same as those who work for an hour.

Let it be.

The urgency to learn a life centered on "let it be" increases this past week, with Jesus taking on the role of a slave and washing Peter's feet over Peter's indignant objection, followed almost immediately by his arrest at the hands of an angry mob, with threats to resort to the sword, an ear chopped off in anger, an ear healed with his touch.

Let it be.

Pilate, demanding from him, "the truth."

Let it be.

Jesus hanging from the bloody cross.

"Father, forgive them, they don't know what they are doing."

Let it be.

Maybe living a life of "let it be" seems so hard because we fear that it will only bring loss and deprivation, perhaps even death.

But in Jesus, "let it be" means that two fish and four loaves of bread, easily feeds 5000, with plenty left over.

Martha sobs to Jesus that if only he arrived sooner, her brother would not have died ... only to stand moments later in jaw dropping wonder as Lazarus emerges from the tomb!

"Let it be," says Jesus.

If we can develop the eyes to see and the ears to hear, we come to realize that God's "let it be" opens a door from this world of apparent

scarcity and fear and failure into a world where there is always enough, where the joyful shout is "Don't be afraid!"

And most amazingly, "let it be" is what brings us this morning to the garden, a tomb once closed tight, containing the corpse of that crucified, blaspheming man, now open, now empty.

A woman is crying in shock and loss, wondering where they have taken him.

And in her bewilderment, there he stands.

She thinks he's the gardener, perhaps because he has dirt beneath his fingernails; because God's "let it be" is always spoken in the midst of real human life, in the midst of our Tuesday morning questions and Monday afternoon struggles and Thursday evening anxieties and wonders.

In Genesis, at the dawn of creation, God says: "Let there be" ... light, earth, oceans and animals, and finally, God's masterpiece, human beings.

God digs into the mud and brings out the first human being; breathes into it, and voila!

The image of God: this odd mixture of mud breathing the breath of the divine.

In Exodus, God digs all the way to the bottom of the Red Sea, parting its' waters, as he leads the chosen people into a new land - into a new way of living.

Throughout the Older Testament, God continues to have dirt beneath his fingernails as he takes care of the poor, the widow, the illegal alien -

ensuring they have their most basic needs met, as he plucks from foreigners the powerful women who form the backbone of the lineage of the people of God.

And here comes Jesus.

His birth is announced first to shepherds, (who have more than just dirt under their fingernails!) – and his ministry lifts up the sick, the loser, the outcast, the blind.

In the ordinary face of Jesus, God comes to us in our ordinary lives – lives that face addiction and arguments; lives that confront death and cancer and heart attacks and hurt feelings and misunderstood emotions and pain from childhoods long gone – all of which create dirt beneath the fingernails of us all.

And into these our lives, Jesus says to us:

“I’m not here to say who is good and who is evil, who is right and who is wrong; I’m here to serve, I’m here to forgive.”

And if we are wise, we will seek to do the same with each other.

Let it be.

It’s when we refuse to “let it be” that our troubles begin.

Insisting on power and control, we dig for ourselves graves in which we bury, if not ourselves, then one another; graves dug for revenge or anger or fear or lost hope or anxiety or shame....yet God continually and always and daily digs us out of those graves, restoring us to life, getting

his fingernails dirty, even when we can't see it, even when we don't want it. Nadia Bolz Weber, paraphrased.

Let it be.

Still looking at him, still, not putting two and two together, suddenly the tension breaks.

He calls her name: "Mary!"

And hearing him call her name, she sees him again, perhaps for the first time.

And when she grabs him, he reminds her: "Let it be."

And she does.

Will we?

+amen

