

John 20:1-18

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes.

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

Sermon: Sowing Seeds of Kindness

The last Sunday in Lent we read the passage from John's gospel where Jesus talks about the crucifixion and says: The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.

I don't know how many times I've read that passage and pondered its meaning, but for some reason, on that day, as we began confirmation class with the familiar prayer: Lord, make us instruments of your peace - where there is hatred, let us sow love - on that day something about the words opened up for me.

These are words that call for trust and patience. Nothing in here talks about overpowering, or taking charge, or forcing sudden change - it's about planting seeds, covering them with earth, leaving them alone, letting them die so that in their season they may grow - Very truly, I

tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.

If we encounter hatred, our prayer is to sow seeds that will bear the fruit of love;
If we encounter doubt, our prayer is to sow seeds that will bear the fruit of faith;
If we encounter sadness, our prayer is to sow seeds that will bear the fruit of joy.

I thought it interesting that in this morning's Gospel lesson Mary mistakes Jesus for the gardener. Maybe she wasn't so far off - Jesus speaks as a gardener would speak: Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. The joy Mary felt was the first fruit of the resurrection. The joy we feel today is an abundant harvest.

Back in the time of the Civil War a young musician named Knowles Shaw wrote a hymn based on a verse from Psalm 126 - Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves." (Psalm 126:6). Perhaps you are familiar with the words:

Sowing in the morning,
Sowing seeds of kindness,
Sowing in the noontide
And the dewy eve;
Waiting for the harvest,
And the time of reaping,
We shall come rejoicing,
Bringing in the sheaves

Seeds of kindness, mercy, comfort, encouragement, faith, hope, and love - we would do well to keep those seeds at hand and be always ready to sow them in the soil of sadness, suffering and despair that we encounter in the lives of so many people. We may not see a sudden transformation when we plant those seeds, but in their season we can trust they that they will bear fruit.

Seeds take time to sprout and grow. You might plant a seed and never know the outcome.

Has anyone here ever read the book I Got a D in Salami?

It's the second in a series of books about Hank Zipzer: The World's Greatest Underachiever, written by Henry Winkler. My children came of age a little before these books were written, but they sound delightful. In the second book Hank gets his report card from 4th grade. It's really bad and he doesn't want his parents to see it. Without giving away the whole story, let's just say complications arise when the report card gets thrown into a grinder making Salami.

Hank has problems - for one thing he has a very hard time reading - turns out he is dyslexic, although no one seems to be able to figure that out in the early grades. In this Hank Zipzer reflects the real life of Henry

Winkler and so he is able to give voice to some of the struggles and frustrations of a child who is constantly confronting obstacles to achievement and success.

The only reason I know about Hank Zipzer is because I bought another book by Henry Winkler - *I've Never Met an Idiot on the River* - reflections on family, photography, and fly fishing. In this book Winkler describes some of the frustrations he faced as a student in high school. I knew Henry well in high school and we took almost all our classes together. He was always a friendly and funny guy. But this was a small all boys college prep private school in Manhattan and the pressure was relentless for good grades and academic success.

Even the music program was rigorous - we sang Gregorian chants, madrigals by Monteverdi, Latin masses by Hans Leo Hassler - but it was an activity, not a class, we didn't get graded and the music teacher, Mr. Rock, had a great gift to welcome all interested students to participate and sing - even people like me and Henry.

So Winkler writes in the book: Mr Rock saw that my self-esteem was low because of my poor grades and my inability to chant in key. I took a lot of flak, some of it in Latin which I didn't understand. One day he told me something that made a huge difference in my life. He said, "I promise you, Henry, when you get out of here, you will be fine."

I sent my book to Henry asking him to sign it and saying how much I enjoyed his recollection of Mr. Rock. When he wrote back he said: Mr. Rock is one of the stars of Hank Zipzer - then underneath he writes: The power of a single sentence!

I promise you - You will be fine. - a seed of kindness and encouragement planted by a single sentence - something long remembered, a seed that bore fruit in the most unpredictable way.

Now I realize we have traveled a distance from the resurrection, but I could give you a single sentence spoken by angels at both Jesus birth and death which further illustrates the point. The angels said: Do not be afraid

Do not be afraid; for see-I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.

Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay.

I've often thought that the miracle of the resurrection is easily misunderstood. If it's thought of as simply resuscitation we miss the point. People are resuscitated all the time, and that is quite a miracle in itself. But what we see in the resurrection is more - it is spiritual alchemy - the transformation of the most base material into the finest gold.

All the oppression of both the Roman and the Jewish state, all the injustice of a corrupt court and self-serving bureaucrats, all the cruelty and humiliation of execution by crucifixion, the jeering of the crowds, the bullying mocking taunts of the soldiers - all this intensely evil energy was focused on Jesus - he suffered all this to the point of death.

Only when they were sure that they had bled all the life out of him would they allow him to be taken down and buried,

But now God takes all that evil, all that cruelty, all that most base human behavior and transforms it into a blessing - the blessing of a risen Jesus, the blessing of a Jesus who will say: Peace be with you.

If Jesus had risen from the grave and gone after the soldiers, gone after Pilate and Caiaphas and Judas and all the others who conspired in his death, then it would have been a story of resuscitation and revenge. But that's not the story - the miracle is that where there was hate, Jesus sowed love; where there was injury, Jesus sowed forgiveness, where there was fear Jesus sowed faith, where there was finality, Jesus sowed eternity.

No one can say what kind of experiences each of us brings to this hour together this morning - what words might characterize the state of our souls today. Some may have come today with fear - fear about losing a job, fear about a child's well being, fear about health or age or death; some may have come with sadness, some with doubt or anger. Will any of us walk out of here a different person than we walked in? I don't know.

What I do know is that this day invites us to be open to the seeds of the Gospel which inspire our words and songs and prayers - that single sentence of affirmation that John put on paper so long ago: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. "

And I also know that each of us has the power at any given moment to sow a seed of kindness, of faith, of hope, of love in the lives of our family, our friends, our co-workers, and everyone whose arc of life intersects with ours - and that we can never imagine how that seed might blossom and flourish in the future.

We too can bear the seeds of resurrection power - we can pray, Lord, make us instruments of your peace.