

A sermon for the Parish of the Epiphany, an Episcopal Church in Winchester, Massachusetts, preached by the rector, the Reverend Thomas J. Brown, on the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Day of Easter, 4 April 2010.
To God be the glory.

It is wonderful to have all of you here. This is the one day every year when just about everything seems over the top – the brass, the flowers everywhere - and all of you in your Easter finery. Yesterday afternoon we celebrated three baptisms, and one of the children had hand-knit brightly colored socks. When I admired them he said, “they’re for Easter.”

There was a time of course when many people made their clothing for this day. My sister-in-law says that every holiday she made a new dress, relying on a pattern, and a tradition. We follow a tradition here, every week, but today especially, that’s central to the Christian faith: God raised Jesus from the dead, and because of that nothing in this world, not evil, not cruelty, not illness, not loss, not even death, are the last words.

Let me introduce you to somebody. A woman who was a sister in faith to Mary Magdalene and the other women. Throughout her 90 years, right up until her death two years ago yesterday, she tutored me, and many others, to live in Christ’s embrace. In 1918, she was baptized with the name Marion, so even her name echoed with those first witnesses of resurrection. And long before she was my grandmother, she cultivated a relationship with Christ, so her knowledge and wisdom ran deep.

Besides being the best grandmother, and the person who led me to faith, she sewed. She wasn’t an expert seamstress, but her sewing machine was often on the counter. I remember my sister, Kimberly, having a melt-down because she’d lost the pattern for how to make an apron. My grandma smiled and said, “you don’t need a pattern. Let me show you.” But of course she had a pattern. In her love for my sister, in the ways that she formed me, in her service to others, all of it was a pattern of Christ’s resurrection, a pattern of bringing new life and hope. Her life wasn’t perfect, and it certainly wasn’t free from struggle or pain, but it was a life in which she stood open for what was to come, hopeful that it would be abundant and life-giving.

Marion Brown wasn’t a saint, nor was she a Mary Magdalene Jr., but she lived the pattern of Christ’s resurrection. So can you and so can I.

The resurrection is first perceived by women, and in their discovery, they give us a pattern. Go back to the tomb for a moment, with Mary Magdalene, she who’s in all four gospels. Her devotion kept her at the tomb, and my hunch is that she had a gift for keeping vigil, for staying close to him, the one who united her with the living God. That’s the pattern! In the risen Christ we experience resurrection in our lives. There’s no emphasis on biology or scientific proof of resurrection, nobody actually witnessing Jesus being raised from the dead. Instead it’s Mary’s *encounter* with him that gives us the pattern on which our lives and destinies depend. “Woman, why are you weeping?” “Tell me where you have laid Jesus.” “Mary!” “Rabbouni!” There it is. The pattern is love that never dies, love which is from a God who gives himself to friends.

She hurries to tell the disciples, so it's no wonder that the early church called her the apostle to the apostles. The men are still in agony about Good Friday, but a grieving Mary makes herself available to a different pattern, one in which life triumphs over death. Always. Always. Always.

The women who went to the tomb took spices, and they lingered there, fully expecting the old configuration of things: that death is the end, so they go to perform their undertaking job, it was the historic pattern of mourning, of death winning, but instead they experience Christ arisen. That's the pattern we follow, and before long, we too, like those women, are drawn more and more into God's bosom. If you come here seeking a sense of newness, then let Easter overtake you. God is capable not just of creation, but of new creation.

William Sloane Coffin, the late preacher at Riverside Church, said, "Christ is risen to convert us, not from this life to some other life, but from something less than life, to the possibility of full life."

In our melt-downs about life's hardships, or our regret about the past, consider the women who go to the tomb. They give us themselves as patterns. Instead of sympathy for the crucified Christ, we're shaped for loyalty to the resurrected one.

If you've lost the pattern, let this morning's liturgy and music help you to rediscover it, or to use the words of Marion Brown, "let me show you." If you've never had it, we give it you in love and gratitude, and we say "you are welcome here." The feast is for us all, and the resurrected host, invites us into his life, and to pattern our lives with newness and beauty.

May the joy of Easter, all 50 days of it, be among us all.