

Have you ever had a “nowhere else to go” moment?
That time when you were all out of answers
and filled with more questions than you could imagine?
And in desperation, you reached out for
anything to grab on to and everything to cling to.
It is hitting absolute rock bottom—
whether through brokenness, pain, or failure—
and finding that the only option left is to cry out to God,
maybe turning desperation into a life-changing encounter.
Or your "nowhere else to go" moment is moving
from desperation to prayer, perhaps.

I’ve had several of those, my divorce.
The death of my dad. A couple of health scares.
But what first came to mind was something a little less dramatic...
One time at a church event, we had an outdoor climbing wall as an activity.
And I mustered up the courage to try it.
And as I was climbing that wall,
and as my fear of heights...well, heightened 😬,
I was grasping each handhold tighter and tighter,
all while not looking down.
I was desperate to get a grip any way I could.
And I was successful, even in my fear,
in getting to where I was trying to go.

Abraham Lincoln famously said,
"I have been driven many times to my knees
by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go.
My own wisdom and that of all about me seemed insufficient for the day".

Often, we treat God as a last resort,
but the moments when our own wisdom,
strength, and resources are completely exhausted
are precisely the moments when
we are forced to rely fully on God.
It is the realization that all other doors are closed
that makes us truly thankful for the one door
that remains open or the one stone that is rolled away.
On this day, when we celebrate the women
in our lives and in our faith,

we flash back to Resurrection Sunday at the tomb.

Where the women found themselves
as they made their way to the tomb,
desperately seeking Jesus or something.

In Luke's version, it says

Very early in the morning on the first day of the week, the women went to the tomb, bringing the fragrant spices they had prepared. Later he will name them.

And Mark tells us When the Sabbath was over,
Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James,
and Salome (sa-LOH-may her name means peace)
bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body.
And in Matthew 28, after the Sabbath,
at dawn on the first day of the week,
Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.
So, if we include all these women,
we have...Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James,
Salome, maybe another Mary, and the other women.
Probably a dozen women and a lot of Marys.

I'm going to stay in Matthew to set the scene...

2 There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it.

When the women arrived at the tomb,
they were greeted by an unnamed angel
who brought an earthquake with him.

How nice, and Matthew tells us:

3 His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow.

He rolled the stone back so they
could see that the tomb was empty!
Then he sat on the stone as he addressed them.
The angel spoke three important messages to the women,
and they are the same for us.

Don't be afraid. He isn't here. Go and tell.

These are the three instructions
given to us today as Easter people.

Don't be afraid. He isn't here. Go and tell.

Don't Be Afraid the angel said.

5 The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified.”

Imagine a wondrous, heavenly, otherworldly
being looking at you with his face like lightning.
I have always liked the weather, especially storms.
When I was a kid, I would stand at the storm door
and watch the lightning.
Has anyone else ever done that?

Now that I am older, I often sit outside on the porch
in the dark and watch the storms roll in.
And some of those have a lot of lightning,
and once in a while, you get that one
that is super close and lights up the world
as bright as day all around me.
And for a moment, I am afraid and in awe.
That is what I imagine this was like.

We hear again and again that when
angels appear, not to be afraid.
Before Jesus was born,
angels appeared to both Mary and Joseph, saying what?
Do not be afraid.
When they appeared to the shepherd,
what did they say? Do not be afraid.
But to quote a movie line...be afraid, be very afraid.

Mary Magdalene and the other women
were desperate for comfort when they
encountered this bright and shiny angel of the Lord.
They were frightened.
However, it says the women felt “great fear” and “excitement” (verse 8).
Is it possible that desperation isn’t the enemy of faith;
it is the birthplace of it?
It is possible to be faithful witnesses to the Resurrection
while still maintaining a fear of the Lord.
John Wesley, our founder, talked about
working out our salvation in fear and trembling.
Fear here means awe.
We need to be in awe of the great power of the Resurrection.

He Isn't Here the angel says

The message from the angel was,

"6 He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay.

"He isn't here" is a proclamation of the Resurrection.

So much of the gospel message is

summarized in those few words: "He isn't here."

"Here the angel speaks with the knowledge and authority of God,"

This is an announcement that no human being could make;

the act of resurrection is something

that no person is able to witness.

Matthew's account implies that Jesus had

already left the tomb when the angel arrived:

"because he's been raised from the dead" (verse 6).

and the implication is that God did it.

The angel didn't roll the stone away

so Jesus could come out.

He rolled it away so the women

could see that the tomb was empty.

"Come, see the place where they laid him," the angel said (verse 6).

Showing the women and us that when

you are surrounded by a problem you

cannot go over, under, or around—

you have to stop looking for a way out

and start looking to God for a way forward.

That "nowhere else to go" moment is

often where God acts to show God's power.

Matthew doesn't tell us how Jesus came back to life,

or how he came out of the tomb.

He didn't need to because there was

nowhere else to go but forward.

The tomb was empty. Jesus was not there.

He's been raised from the dead.

The last thing the angel tells us. Go and tell.

7 Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.'

Off they went,

“8 So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples.

They were ready to be the first human preachers of the good news after the Resurrection, when the unexpected voice of Jesus appears.

9 Suddenly Jesus met them. “Greetings,” he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him.

They encountered the risen Jesus!
But this time the earth does not shake.
His face does not shine.
His clothes do not glitter.
He performs no superhuman feats.”
He is just Jesus.

They’ve seen Jesus himself!
Not only did they see him, but they also touched him.
Had their fear subsided?
I think they were so desperately seeking him,
Looking for that handhold that
seeing him pushed past their fear.
Seeing and experiencing Jesus in our lives can do that.

The two Marys bow down at Jesus’ feet like the Magi did.

Their gifts were not gold, frankincense, and myrrh.
Rather, they gave him their worship and devotion.
After greeting the two women warmly,
Jesus gave them much the same message that the angel gave

10 Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee;

The good news of the Resurrection must be told.
It is not a secret.
It’s a major news flash, even bigger than an earthquake.
Jesus has been raised!
Go and tell! Go where? Go to Galilee.
That’s where Jesus carried out his
ministry of teaching, healing, and more.
Jerusalem was behind him now.
They will see me there”

Jesus’ unexpected voice was on its way

to them as it is to us all after Easter.

And in Luke it says **9 When they returned from the tomb, they reported all these things to the eleven and all the others.**

But like men have discounted women throughout history, it says

11 Their words struck the apostles as nonsense, and they didn't believe the women.

But their words did get Peter to run to the tomb,
but he was not ready to meet Jesus yet.

And if you end Mark where most believe Mark ended,
then the women said nothing to anyone,
for they were afraid.

But the longer ending I included says Mary Magdalene
did share the news, and they didn't believe her.

But in Matthew's eyes, we can assume
that the women did go and tell. Why?

Because Jesus met the disciples on a mountain in Galilee right after this.

And women, from century to century and generation to generation,
have been telling the story of Jesus ever since.

Although the power of the church
has usually rested in the hands of men,
it is the heart of the church that has been
nurtured by our mothers, grandmothers,
spiritual mothers, and other mothers.

Our founder, John Wesley's mother, Susannah,
played a major role in his upbringing and early faith.

Some of the early Methodist communities in America
were founded by women or women who voluntold
the men around them, what they should be doing.

And as I mentioned in Lent, this year,

actually, just this week on May 4,
marked the 70th anniversary of the General Conference
granting full clergy status to women.

I give thanks for the trailblazers, the firsts,
the women I serve alongside,
and those who will come after them.

The journey towards ordination was not easy,
with women gaining and losing their
clergy statuses throughout Methodist history.

And women are still drastically underrepresented
as clergy in local churches; in many places,
they are compensated less,
and still face systemic barriers to their success.
And still they carry on the great tradition of the women
who were the first evangelists in a time
when a woman's testimony couldn't be considered in a court,
and a Jewish male would pray
and thank God every day they weren't a woman.

But Jesus chose to appear first to the women who had followed him.

To the women who weren't afraid to be
at the cross or come to the tomb,
not knowing what they would find
or how they would roll the stone away.
But even in their fear, they found the faith to follow.
To climb their wall of doubt and cling to Jesus' promises.

I would say that God saw women and does see women
just as worthy of being disciples and proclaimers as Jesus did through his own.

So today, how will we honor the legendary lives
of these women of faith and all who have since
come as saints in the church and our own lives?