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Easter Morning 2011

What would it have been like on that first Easter morning? You and I already come with the news. In our life time we've already sung alleluia's....already proclaimed resurrection. We've hunted colored and gathered with family and friends. We've known from the beginning of Lent .....we knew even as we stood at the manger at Christ's coming.....that this day of joy would come....that the story of crucifixion and sealed tomb would end with good news. It's not breaking news for us anymore.....we already know the rest of the story....as we've already determined these last weeks of Lent.

**But that's not how the first Easter morning began for the disciples. The shrouded sky of Friday was still hanging around in those early moments on that first Easter morning. The darkness, the nagging whispering darkness of betrayal and denial remained a bitter aftertaste. A taste they could not shake....a taste water could not wash away.....a taste accompanied by nausea and exhaustion.**

**This is how the morning began all those years ago.....morning sickness rather than new birth.**

The once confident response....the disciples had offered Jesus.....that they would follow him no matter what....no matter where "the following" took them....no matter who they were to meet! "We will follow you Lord, where ever you go. You can trust us...You can depend on us!"  
(pause)

That promise.....faded into the darkness as if it had been sealed off along with Jesus' dead body behind that huge stone in the garden.

**It wasn't supposed to turn out this way. This isn't what they expected! It was not what they signed up for. So....in numbness they sat together asking questions: What had it all been for? Why had they left their families....dropped their nets....left all they had ever known to follow this one named Jesus? What was all that teaching about on the side of the mountain....in the boat on the shore of the lake? What had become of the healing and the hope?**

Grief was still very much present as the sun rose on the third day. There was no sun rise service, or instrumental ensemble, no empty baskets for an egg hunt or Easter breakfast. They had no reference of Easter bonnets or parades! There were no choirs joining with the angels to sing to the highest, or Easter lilies lined up on the chancel filling the sanctuary with their fragrance.

**Oh.....the sun....did rise.....but the disciples..... remained in a state of shock tucked away inside, behind a door....sealed off from the world....numb, not knowing what to do next. Their spirits were empty but they were full of clashing emotions....weighed down by so very many feelings.**

After the shock and grief of Jesus' death, the news of the empty tomb and Jesus' rising from the dead would unfold with gradual growing suspense. The first Easter doesn't happen all at once. God slowly breathes out new life. Step by step the story would break....starting with the women.

**Ahh the women. So many things said about these women.....so many opinions about the women. And yet, despite the cultural/religious stigma ALL women had to carry in that day and time....these women, the ones coming to care for Jesus' body... are the first to see and to trust what God was doing in the garden. The women were the first witnesses....the very first of all other humans to encounter the breaking news taking place in the garden.**

You see.....Easter is a garden story.....and it isn't the first garden story in the Bible. In the very beginning of God's story..... there's another one. And the woman in the first garden....like the

women in the Easter garden.....was the first to act....to ask questions....to explore.....to invite. And, it is the man in the first garden, like the disciples of Easter.... who takes a little longer to catch on....but when he does he fully participates.

**The outcome of the first Garden story is less than appealing and is the very reason God gathers the women and eventually the disciples in the garden for this Easter story. God tells another garden story. After generations of tilling and planting and harvesting all is ready.....God's garden story is ready for public consumption.**

In the first garden story....it is the choice of the woman and the man. They choose to eat what they were not supposed to eat.....and the consequences were costly.....the gates of the garden bust open and the man and the woman are poured out.....like a carafe of water on a dry dusty day. It was their choice....they wanted what was not theirs to have. It was their choice.....and their choice cost them life in the garden.

**In the second garden story it is all about God's choice....God's sovereign choice that the stone be rolled away....that the tomb be emptied....that redemption become not only gift but reality.**

The first Easter Sunday becomes known when the women stand before the empty tomb. The stone already rolled away...they stood together to see what they would find....and what they found was a land of promise of a whole other kind....they were the first to step foot in this new territory....they were the first to bare witness as to what God was up too. They ran to tell the others....to tell the disciples.....to invite and encourage and to escort them back to the garden so that they might encounter the good news of God's choice.

**Eventually the disciples snapped out of their shrouded stupor and bolted out of the room where they had been cloistered and saw with their own eyes and felt with their own hearts the newness, the life, the hope beyond all hope God so purposely created.**

This whole Easter scene revolves around God's doing. Easter had taken place in the garden before any other woman or man has time to show up. Easter is not our doing. Easter is God's doing.....in the very same way those first days of creation were God's doing. God creates a brand new reality a land ripe with new covenant.....new promise.....new life in the Easter garden.

**The tomb is empty...the Christ is risen and Easter waits for the arrival of witnesses.**

**God brings life back to the garden....God brings us back to the garden! God....despite all our mistakes and belly aching and arguing....despite our questioning and opinions as we journey through life....God does what we cannot do. God chooses life for you and me. God chooses to invite us and to welcome us to a new beginning!**

Today.....is our turn to step into the land of promise. Each time we tell the Easter story we proclaim what God has done and is doing. Easter is a reality for this day. The new life God promises is not in some far off land in the by and by. Easter breaks into our life right where we are! Easter story is about rolling away the stones in our lives and opening the way for new beginnings. We are not suck in the tombs of our depression or anger....we are no longer bound by dysfunction are failure.....we are no longer asleep with apathy and cynicism.

**Easter is God's choice and our gift.**

**Easter is a reality for you and me.....right now....today.**

Let the good news of God's sovereign choice fill you to overflowing. Come to the table and taste the goodness. And when we gather next to sing....let the notes of joy and life come from the bottom of your toes!

*"Roll away your stone, I'll roll away mine  
Together we can see what we will find...  
And so I'll be found  
With my stake stuck in this ground  
Marking the territory of this newly  
empassioned soul." Mumford and Sons-*

Welcome to the promisedland sisters and brothers.

Amen.