

Broken Open: A Holy Week Retreat Experience

Today is Easter Sunday my name is JoAnn Lopez. I serve as the Campus Minister for Liturgy. Our theme today is: Breaking Open into Lifetime Transformation.

We think we know the story of Easter. The empty tomb. Death into Life. The Risen Jesus appearing to his disciples. After the drama of the Passion, we call it a triumph. As Christians we might be quick to say to the suffering: “Don’t be too sad! Everything works out fine in the end! God wins!” But if we pay deep attention to the story of this holy week, as we have throughout this retreat, we find that just as he did throughout his Incarnation, life, and death, in his Resurrection Jesus turns our understanding of power and victory upside down.

Jesus did not come to overthrow the oppressive powers of this world through violence, but to transform the fabric of our lives to align more deeply with God’s dream of love for the world. Jesus’ earthly ministry of teaching, healing, feeding, reconciling, and restoring relationship revealed God’s kingdom of love, justice, mercy, inclusion, and hope breaking into the world. As we have reflected throughout this week, this mission of proclaiming the kingdom threatened the powerful, and ultimately led to Jesus’ violent death. Jesus’ Resurrection, just like his life and death, does not destroy the powers that be, but exposes their hypocrisy, brutality, and illegitimacy. The Resurrection does not end all tyranny. The Risen Jesus does not appear to the powerful with vindication, like some action hero in a revenge fantasy film.

In every Gospel account we hear this instead: brokenhearted women, like Mary Magdalene, who were witnesses to Jesus’ crucifixion, who courageously go to the tomb to anoint Jesus’ body, become the first witnesses to the Resurrection. The Risen Jesus appears first to the distressed, disbelieved, and disposable, and empowers them to be unafraid witnesses of hope and love.

The message of Resurrection is not one of triumph but transformation. Today we know the pervasiveness of the forces of greed, violence, injustice, demonization, and dehumanization in our world, and we also know that as a church we ourselves have been complicit in these death-dealing forces through our actions or our collective silence in the face of oppression.

This Easter we must remember that the continued presence of suffering and oppression does not negate the Resurrection. The Resurrection is not magical triumph of good over evil, but a decisive declaration that no matter the forces that threaten us, God is continually bringing life, hope, love, peace, and joy into our world, just as Jesus proclaimed with his life. We celebrate Easter not just as a historical event, but an ongoing reality of God's transforming love breaking into our world. This is the truth we are called to be witnesses to. The challenge for us as Christians, as a Church, is whether we will follow Jesus and stand anew with the vulnerable and despised against the powers of exploitation and domination in our world today, for it is precisely at the margins that God comes with Resurrection Life.

It is only if we become like the women at the tomb that we will experience the transforming joy and hope of the Resurrection. We must allow ourselves to be brokenhearted people in this world, who draw near to those who suffer with tenderness, and live always as witnesses to Jesus' Way of compassionate love. We must trust that the breaking of our hearts will not shatter us, but break us open to encountering Resurrection grace. When we live with broken open hearts we are able to live and love like Jesus did, with vulnerability, mercy, compassion, and a commitment to solidarity. We find that it is precisely in the places of our world's suffering that God desires to dwell, and bring transformation, life, and hope, in and through us.

As we end our Holy Week Retreat Experience, may we find ourselves breaking open to God's transforming hope. The good news about Easter is that our Church celebrates it not as a day, but as a season – indeed as a lifetime hope. So as we end this retreat experience, I invite you to continue savoring the graces and invitations of this retreat. Notice how God might be calling you to break open. How the Cross and Resurrection might be present each day in our lives. Continue to reflect on these questions: How can we be more like the women disciples at the cross and tomb? What does it mean for you to live as a witness to resurrection, to God's transforming hope in our world? What new life and transformation is God calling you to today?