

SERMON

Pastor Cris Frigm

The story begins in the dark. Not just the story of Easter, but the story of God and God's creation begins in the dark.

“In the beginning, when God began to create the heavens and the earth, ²the earth was complete chaos, and **darkness** covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. ³Then God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. ⁴And God saw that the light was good...” (Genesis 1:1-4a)

I'm not a literalist when it comes to the story of creation. I'm not going to tell you it happened in seven 24-hour days, and I don't think the creation story in Genesis is a scientific treatise, but it is the beginning of how we understand God and God at work in the world. In the beginning, God created and all this came into being. John, the writer of this resurrection story, makes a connection between what God was doing in creation and what God was doing in the resurrection garden.

John had connected Jesus to creation from the beginning of his story, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.” (John 1:1-4) Jesus is the “Word.”

You can hear the echo. John goes out of the way in the telling of his part of the story of God to place it within the **entire** story of God. It is one story – that begins in the darkness of chaos until God brought light into being through the birth of the light of God in the flesh to **this** day. To this garden. To this story of new creation that comes in the resurrection of Jesus. To this rebirth of light.

At his death, Jesus is placed in a new tomb – previously unused, which was uncommon – in a garden. For a Gospel writer who loves to write the story with as many layered meanings as possible, the imagery is pretty

straightforward: God's creation began in a garden – at least metaphorically speaking – and what God is now doing takes place in a garden.

It's in the garden of the resurrection that God upends the path of the world. It's in the garden near Jerusalem where two disciples get a hint of what God is doing when they experience the emptiness of the tomb. It's in this garden where Mary Magdalene, beloved disciple, experiences the truth of God's love and power.

It began early on that first day, while it was still dark when Mary went perhaps to simply grieve. She didn't go expecting her world to change. She went so that she could remain close to the teacher she had loved, the teacher she assumed was still dead. It's a time of chaos as she finds the tomb open and empty. It's a time of fear as she runs back to tell her friends that something had changed – not knowing yet just **how much** it had changed.

Peter and the other disciple, perhaps the author of this very story, **run** to see for themselves. And they believe...something has happened, we don't know exactly what they believed. But their experience isn't the focus of this part of the Ester story. Mary is still weeping. Mary is still living in the darkness, in the shadow of death, in the chaos. Until...

...God speaks. The messengers question her emotions and nothing changes. The dawn is coming, but she still lives in darkness. Until Jesus calls her name. God spoke the world into being and God speaks in this garden to Mary. In this new creation, in which death no longer has the last word, God restores and renews a relationship with the people that God created to be good – to be very good.

She turns to the one who calls her name, the one she assumed to be the gardener – which in and of itself is layered with meaning in this story's telling – she turns to see the risen Christ, God **still** in the world. She sees him and sees that everything has changed. The world is new. The light is still shining – or perhaps better to say, the light is shining again.

But the story doesn't end with her recognition. It's not enough that God in Christ has called her name, she is then sent to proclaim the good news, to be the messenger of this new creation so that the world would begin to know the truth of what God is doing. "I have seen the Lord!" she now announces. It's no longer a declaration of fear or concern that the body is missing; it's now a professed belief in what God has recreated. The world will never be the same again.

We hear this news from Mary on this day. We are reminded once again in the midst of whatever chaos and darkness is still at work in the world that the dawn of this new creation has come. I don't know what darkness might be lingering in your lives, but I know there is still darkness. We still face death at the end of life. Our own brokenness still causes harm to so many and creates so much chaos.

It may feel like chaos is overwhelming the story of new life. There is plenty of evil happening in our individual and collective lives that tries to pull us away from God, that tries to claim our hearts and minds, that tries to deny the truth of this story. It may feel like the good news is more of a history lesson than a new creation for us.

But this story is for you. It's not just a 2000-year-old fable. The resurrection is a living truth that takes us out of the darkness into the light of a new garden – a garden where God is still at work, creating and breaking into the world so that we can believe, so that we can see the light of the world. The light has risen again; Christ has risen indeed. Amen.