

**“Singing in Haiti”**  
Rev. Robert H. Wade  
Easter – April 4, 2010  
Isaiah 65:17-25 - John 20:1-18

John 20:1-18: “Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. <sup>2</sup>So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.” <sup>3</sup>Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. <sup>4</sup>The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. <sup>5</sup>He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. <sup>6</sup>Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, <sup>7</sup>and the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. <sup>8</sup>Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; <sup>9</sup>for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. <sup>10</sup>Then the disciples returned to their homes.

<sup>11</sup>***But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb.*** As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; <sup>12</sup>and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. <sup>13</sup>They said to her, “***Woman, why are you weeping?***” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” <sup>14</sup>When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. <sup>15</sup>Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” <sup>16</sup>***Jesus said to her, “Mary!”*** She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabbouni!” (which means Teacher). <sup>17</sup>Jesus said to her, “Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” <sup>18</sup>Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “***I have seen the Lord!***”; and she told them that he had said these things to her.”

*The Word of the Lord....***Thanks be to God!**

Rev. William Willimon, Bishop of the United Methodist North Alabama Conference and one of America's great preachers, tells of sending a couple of mission teams to Haiti following the horrific earthquake. These mission teams entered the hell of Haiti where it is estimated that over 250,000 people died, and hundreds of thousands more were maimed. The stench of death filled their nostrils. They saw the piles of rubble that had been homes. They witnessed men, women and children wandering the streets begging for food. They gave themselves, along with hundreds of other relief workers, to their heart breaking labor of love.

We have all seen the earthquake's devastation on our TVs and in magazines but we can't begin to imagine the horror unless we actually experience it first hand like the members of the mission teams. They saw it all....truly one of the worst disasters to ever slam our corner of the world. But do you know what caught their attention more than anything else? It wasn't the death....or the cries of those with broken bodies....or the desperation of those searching for loved ones in the midst of the rubble.....no, they expected to witness those cruel results of such destruction. What caught their attention was the unexpected.....many of the people of Haiti were singing! Most would agree that, of all the people in the world, the people of Haiti have nothing to sing about. Yet, there they were, singing hymns of praise and thanksgiving. (*"Now can we sing?"* by William H. Willimon, *Christian Century*, March 23, 2010, Page 11-12.)

Like the mission team, Mary came to the garden tomb that first Easter morning with no expectation of joyful song. Why would she? Mary's heart was stuck on Friday. All she could picture was her beloved Jesus hanging, stone cold dead, on a cross and then being laid in a tomb. She couldn't erase those scenes from her mind and now her only desire was to give Jesus a proper burial and say her final good-byes but, to add salt to the wound, someone had stolen his body. We can all relate....***"Mary, stood weeping outside the tomb."*** Cemeteries often evoke tears. Cemeteries confront us head-on with the finality of death. Mary was engulfed in Friday's darkness.

We all find ourselves stuck in Friday's darkness at times. This past Thursday our community was touched with a tragedy that, no doubt, has many fixated on Friday. I am speaking of the plane crash in Miamisburg that killed **Tom Hausfeld** and his daughter, **Kacie**. In yesterday's Dayton Daily News (p. B6) *Tom Archdeacon*, in his article "Tough time for everybody," quoted UD's Athletic Director, *Tim Wabler*, "**It was a stunning day for the UD community in a lot of ways," a somber Wabler said late Thursday night. "In the afternoon, there was the terrible tragedy that impacted a family, a team, our whole school. Then we turn around that night and have a tremendous win in a national tournament....The whole thing left you stunned.**" What a roller coaster of emotions. Our heart and prayers go out the Hausfeld family and all who find themselves stuck in the darkness of Friday.

While most of us have not experienced the death of loved ones through a plane crash, all of us have been stuck in the agony of Friday. Life hits us up side the head and we realize that life will never be the same. Death, divorce, disease, depression or disappointments cross the threshold of our lives. In those unwanted challenges that knock the props out from under our lives we easily identify with Mary who "**stood weeping outside the tomb.**" *There may be some here today who are stuck in the agony of Friday wondering if Sunday will ever come.*

However, my hunch is that most of us live between Friday and Sunday, on that nameless day of Saturday. We now call Friday, Good, and Sunday, Easter. If we were to name Saturday we might call it *Silent*. That was the day the disciples went into hiding and little is said of that day in the scriptures. No doubt that *Silent Saturday* was given over to regrets....*if only* I hadn't denied him....*if only* I hadn't run from him.....*if only* we hadn't come to Jerusalem in the first place. No doubt that *Silent Saturday* was given over to fear, anger and grief.....*what if* the Romans come looking for us.....*why* don't we hit back and take out a few Roman soldiers and religious leaders...seek some revenge....*who* can I turn to now that Jesus has been killed. Think of the *silent suffering* experienced by Jesus' followers on that *Silent Saturday*.

I would guess that many of us live in Silent Saturday....that in-between day when, it seems, God has taken a coffee break. Some might be wondering *where is the resurrection* when you work night and day in a thankless job and yet find yourselves deeper in debt. Some might be wondering *where is the resurrection* when you don't even have a thankless job. Some might be wondering *where is the resurrection* when your child gets caught in an ugly cycle of drugs and alcohol. Some might be wondering *where is the resurrection* when you wake up each morning and realize nothing matters to you anymore. Some might be wondering *where is the resurrection* when chronic pain and deteriorating health is now your new normal. Some might be wondering *where is the resurrection* when feelings of anger, resentment, shame and hopelessness flood your heart like a broken record. *There may be some here today who are stuck in the pain of Silent Saturday wondering if Sunday will ever come. It will!*

As Mary leaned into the empty tomb she saw two angels sitting where Jesus had been laid. They asked, ***“Woman why are you weeping?”*** She lamented, ***“They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.”*** As she offered her lament she turned and saw a man she presumed to be the gardener. Persistently she asked if he knew where Jesus' body had been taken. We know the story.....Easter came to Mary as the “gardener” revealed his true identity by simply calling her by name, ***“Mary.”*** In that moment the darkness of Friday and the silence of Saturday were overcome with the glorious realization that *God will not let death win.* Hearing Jesus call her by name brought resurrection hope to Mary and she had to run and share the good news with her friends.... ***“I have seen the Lord.”*** Yet they would not believe until they, also, heard Jesus call them by name.

And that is what Jesus does.....he comes to us in our Fridays and Saturdays and calls us by name. As we hear Jesus calling our name through faith, God fills us with the assurance that whatever may be holding us down, or breaking our spirit, or disappointing us, or causing us to question God's love will not have the final say. *God will not let death win!*

God is transforming and redeeming our world including our own, personal histories. We don't easily see how God is redeeming our world because we are often stuck in Friday or Saturday but *God will not let death win!* I never tire of reminding myself and any who will listen of God's great plan which we heard from our Old Testament reading this morning and which is echoed in Revelation 21. God *is* creating a New Heaven and a New Earth...

**21** Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. <sup>2</sup>And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. <sup>3</sup>And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; <sup>4</sup>he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for **the first things have passed away.**" <sup>5</sup>And the one who was seated on the throne said, "**See, I am making all things new.**"

I return to this marvelous promise time and time again! I need to be reminded!

I used the following illustration in my Easter sermons of 2000 and 2005, so, this being twenty-ten, it's time to bring it out again.

The story is told of a woman who had been told by her doctor that she had only a few short months to live. She had terminal cancer and the doctor encouraged her to get her affairs in order. So she called her pastor to make plans for her funeral celebration. She planned everything: the scripture, the hymns, who would speak, where the service would be held, everything about the service.

One of her requests was the she have an open casket at the funeral home during the visitation. She also told her pastor that she had one last, special request. "*What's that?*" She said that she wanted to be buried with a *fork* in her hand. "*A fork? Why a fork?*" the pastor asked.

She explained, *“When I was a little girl my mother was the greatest cook in the world. She would make a pot roast every Sunday that would almost melt in your mouth and her oven-fried potatoes were the best. But every Sunday, as she cleared the table, she would always smile and say, “Save your fork because the best is yet to come!” My mother’s specialty was desserts and when my mother said, ‘Save your fork because the best is yet to come’ we knew that, no matter how good the meal had been, the best really was yet to come.”*

So the woman told her pastor that she wanted him standing beside her casket and when people asked what’s with the fork, she told him to tell the people that she knew Jesus Christ and had experienced his love on this earth. And because of her faith in him, she believed, with all her heart, that the best was yet to come.

Tuesday morning I will be standing with Barbara Staley and her family to officiate at her mother’s graveside service. Barbara’s mother, ***Eleanor Deck***, was 97 years old and a long-time member of Fairmont. Barbara told me that her mother had kept a little card with a picture of a fork on it with the words *“the best is yet to come.”* Eleanor had received the card here at Fairmont when I had them passed out at both Easter services in 2000 and 2005. Barbara said her mother had one request.....that she be buried with that card! Barbara has not heard the story of the fork and she has wondered why this little card was so important to her mother. It will be a special blessing to tell the story of the fork at Eleanor’s graveside service.

When Barbara told me of Eleanor’s request I wondered what kind of dark Fridays and silent Saturdays Eleanor must have endured in her 97 years. Only God knows! But we come this Easter to praise God for calling Eleanor by name and for Eleanor’s Easter faith that kept her believing through all of her Fridays and Saturdays that Sunday was coming. Yes, indeed, the best is yet to come!

Listen.....*do you hear it?* In Port-au-Prince they are singing: *Christ the Lord is risen today, Alleluia! **Christ is Risen! He is Risen, Indeed!***  
**Amen**

