

“Encounter”

Easter Sunday

Matthew 28:1-10

Psalm 118: 1,2; 14-24

April 20, 2014

By: Rev. Damaris D. Whittaker

*“But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid;
I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified.
6 He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said.”*

Let us pray...

The Hartford Courant is celebrating their 250 anniversary by highlighting certain articles which they have entitled “Moments in History.”

This week, they highlighted the news stories about Abby and Julia Smith, two sisters who lived in Glastonbury in the 1870s. We learned that they were single and elderly, and also very courageous.

"Strong individualists of an original character," a Jan. 7, 1943, *Hartford Courant* article stated, "Abby and Julia Smith became indignant one day in 1873 when unwise town fathers in Glastonbury increased the tax rate for women without a similar deed for the men."¹

They believed that “taxation without representation is tyranny.” They refused to pay when the town raised taxes on property owned by widows and unmarried women.

So, they went against powerful man at a time when women did not enjoy equal rights. Initially, the town won reposed seven (7) of their cows and auctioned four to satisfied their debt. But eventually, the sisters got their cows back and prevailed.

¹ **Elderly Sisters Who Refused To Pay Their Taxes Won Victory For Equal Rights
Constable Seized Seven Cows From Two Glastonbury Spinners**

April 15, 2014 | By PETER MARTEKA, pmarteka@courant.com, The Hartford Courant

While their tax battles were the premise of the news article, I was quite pleased to also learned that Julia Evelina Smith translated the Bible from Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. “Her reasoning?” the article stated, “Only men had translated the Bible and she wanted to know the status of women in the holy book.”

To her, the fact that only men had translated it, made it an “incomplete work.”

Julia was looking to find a God she could relate to and she wanted to know, if in a male-dominated world, women were important to God. Arguably, she might have been a feminist theologian.

But I do wonder, what was the effect of this translation on Julia. Was her world changed? Did she discover God in a different way? Was her life shaken? Was her understanding transformed?

In the Gospel lesson this morning, we find ourselves in the company of women in the Garden looking for Jesus.

At first, the women went there to pay their respects. Jesus had died and had been buried. Presumably, she was expecting to find a closed tomb.

But instead they are surprised by a tomb that was opened and was empty. This story contains many moments where the word “suddenly” is used. “Suddenly there was an earthquake for the angel of the Lord came and rolled back the stone” (Matthew 28:2). And, there was a new revelation.

For it is perhaps obvious to us now that to meet Jesus means that the foundation of our beings will be shaken, we will be surprise and perhaps afraid.

The earth shook and nothing remained the same.

It is significant to note that this new revelation was entrusted to a woman of all people. At a time were the “status of women” was one of being in the margins.

John J Pilch writes:

“This special knowledge, given by Jesus uniquely to Mary Magdalene, makes her a ‘typical’ or representative character.” She has now become an insider, someone who is definitely in the know...an enlightened person who does not depend upon the group or any other person for her special knowledge of Jesus...How, Pilch asks, “did our allegedly patriarchal

ancestors ever accept the help of women in making sense of an empty tomb?”²

The angel commissioned the women and asked them to go tell the disciples that Jesus had been risen and “indeed, he is going ahead of you into Galilee.” (vs. 7.)

They are commissioned with a new message, a new revelation, that was carried by “small ones, the ones on the margins, the ones without voice.”

The women went and follow the instructions of the angel and “suddenly” Jesus met them.”

This beautiful story in the Garden does not focus on the *how* of the resurrection, but on the experience of the resurrection—it focuses on the encounter...an encounter that has the promise to change lives. Mary Magdalene was confronted with a living Jesus. Jesus lives and was ahead of her—he met her.

However, Barbara Brown Taylor, writes, “but he was not on his way back to her and the others, he was on his way to God and he was taking the whole world with him.”³

“Indeed this is one of the central affirmations of Easter: Jesus lives. He is a figure of the present, not simply of the past. The presence his followers had known in Jesus before his crucifixion continued to be experienced and to operate after it.”⁴

But, how has that transformed us? How do we follow Jesus after such an encounter?

Certainly the encounter Mary Magdalene experience is familiar but different for us today.

I hope that we know that Jesus is has already gone ahead of us.

I pray that we become hungry and thirsty for a more personal and also communal encounter with God.

² The Cultural World of Jesus, Year A

³ Barbara Brown Taylor, *Home by Another Way*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, 1999) Kindle Loc 1070

⁴ Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan *The Last Week*, pg 204

I pray that we believe that it will change us. I pray that it will.

I pray that we have an encounter so personal with God that we can join those voices of the womanist theologians when they say “God made a way out of no way, because God met me in the wilderness.”

I pray that we let him “hold on to us” perhaps...better that we let him take us to the white hot presence of God, who is not behind us but ahead of us, every step of the way.”⁵ Amen.

⁵ Barbara Brown Taylor, *Home by Another Way*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, 1999) Kindle Loc 1084