



Richmond Hill Reflections

"No more stone" (Preached by Rev. James Ravenscroft)

April 21, 2019; Easter Sunday

Reading: Luke 24:1-11; Acts 10:34-41; "Expecting Death" by Susan Palo Cherwien in *Crossings*

The empty tomb. Like the cross it's a powerful symbol, evocatively capturing what we celebrate today. The stone is rolled away. The women are told Jesus is not there, revealed as the Christ, the Living One who joins spirit and matter, the heavens and earth. But like the cross, it can narrow, come to signify simply the resurrection of Jesus, only him, and then, just bodily resurrection. The empty tomb becomes just a celebration of us getting into heaven, the defeat of death focused on the next life. But Easter is more than an empty tomb, changing this life and not just the next.

I'd like to share an experience that has become a powerful symbol of Easter for me this year. Last week Glen and I went to the AGO to preview the new infinity room. Amazing. A mirrored room with reflective spheres suspended at various heights as well as on the floor. Wherever we looked everything was reflected in everything else. As we learned later, Kusama Yayoi had a profound experience as a child and has spent her life trying to recreate it in her art. She was looking through the water at a streambed of round stones of various sizes. As she gazed at one tiny stone, she felt overwhelmingly insignificant, lost, separate and alone. Suddenly the feeling flipped, and she was touching the edges of the universe, she and everything else were one.

To my mind, her experience captures the core of Easter's impact. Consider the opening poem. It begins with isolation, sorrow, uncertainty. When I entered the infinity room, I felt disoriented. Everything was reflected but I didn't know where to look. As I started to explore and saw my image repeated infinitely, I felt lost. It was isolating, even egocentric, as if I'm all there is. Then my perspective shifted and as I saw myself repeated, I realized I was connected to everything. That too is the Easter experience. The women discover that the stone placed over the entrance of the tomb has been rolled away. Jesus isn't there. In the tomb angels question why they're looking for the Living One in a cemetery. They are invited to shift how they see him, and themselves.

Crucial is that there is no stone. We think of this as a physical detail but to me it's also symbolic. As I shared on Friday, Peter wrote how Jesus embraced our woundedness so we may be healed. I believe a fundamental wound is the fear-based separation we experience, a sense of being alone, convinced we're unworthy of love. Feeling like this, we're not fully alive, in a sense entombed. So we self-medicate, grasping affirmation not for who we are at heart but how we are perceived: powerful, popular, prestigious. With false bravado we still feel alone. We may form ties with an in group, bolstering esteem by belittling others. This was at play in Jesus' death. He was killed by those who felt their power threatened because he ignored the definitions of who was in or out, making clear that in G-d we're all one. We see the fear carry into the story. The women share the good news with the men but aren't believed, a reminder that Easter is not a single event but a process. We still see this. Consider the rhetoric against gender and sexual minorities as well as immigrants in the Alberta

election campaign. On Thursday a Jewish café in Winnipeg was trashed and vandalized with anti-Semitic graffiti. This morning several churches in Sri Lanka were bombed during their services. We keep pulling apart. As we look for belonging in all the wrong ways the angels might as well say: "Why do you look for Life in so many dead-ends?"

Easter is the opposite of dead-ends. There is no more stone. We're told "Don't be afraid." The barriers that keep us separated, that keep us from truly living, are all rolled away. This is Kusama Yayoi's experience as a child and beautifully captured in her art, the repeating images a reminder that all of us, and the earth, are connected. Early understandings of Easter were that resurrection is shared. Paul writes that through baptism we're all raised in Christ and all creation yearns for resurrection. Matthew says that when Jesus died the dead rose from their graves. The Orthodox, one of the earliest Christian branches, depict the resurrection within their icon tradition as Jesus lifting Adam and Eve from their graves. Easter and Pentecost are one continuous story. Through the Spirit the apostles are understood in many languages. Fears and barriers are finally overcome.

As we look at the world, we may despair that there are still stones that need to be rolled away but as is so often the case, healing and renewal take time. Fortunately, as we hear in Acts, the same Peter who doubted the women came to understand how resurrection removes barriers. His speech about who Jesus was and how after his death he was experienced as alive, present to and through them, was given to Cornelius, a Greek. Until then he believed the gospel message was only for fellow Jews. Evolution happens spiritually as well as physically. We will get there. It's why we share communion, not just a sign there are no stones between us, but for the grace to keep rolling them away, so that we gather not just in a sacred meal, but as one people sharing in common.

For me this is the core of what we celebrate each Easter. Not just the wonder of an empty tomb, but the ongoing presence of the Risen Christ. The resurrection isn't just about one person. The Christ connects us, connects me, you, all humanity, all creatures, the universe. When as a child Kusama Yayoi felt like she was touching the cosmos, the stone that first made her feel so small disappeared. Everything was part of everything else. It was a fleeting experience but real just the same. May we discover the same gift this Easter. May we too recognize there are no more stones. Amen.