



THE WORK OF IMAGINATION

Devotional



We got the news while we were out of town with friends, at a house on the coast. The reception on the call wasn't great, but I'd known it might be coming, and I could make out enough of my mother's broken words to hear the sad news: my grandma, my dad's mom, the last of the elders in our family, had died.

When we hung up, I called my boys and their dad into the room to let them know. Each of us grown-ups took a kid in our arms. We'd lived with her for five years—most of their lives at that point—and we were all heartbroken. A friend knocked on the door, so we came out and shared the news with our traveling companions. They embraced us all in turn.

We all mourn differently.

The boys wanted to be together, but not with anyone else. They went back to the room we'd been sharing and lied down together. They both fell asleep.

Their dad went to the kitchen, started pulling food out of the fridge, asking everyone around what they wanted on a sandwich. No one wanted a sandwich. It was ten o'clock in the morning, and we'd just finished one of those big vacation breakfasts. But seeing he needed something to do, some of the other guys told him their preferences for rye or whole wheat, mustard or mayo, and he got to work.

I walked down to the water's edge. I needed fresh air and open space. I needed to see the expanse. I needed to talk to my grandma, and I didn't need anyone to ask me how I was doing or put an arm around me. It wasn't a crowded coast, but I was struck by the couple walking, hand-in-hand. By the man tossing a ball to his dog, who'd run to catch it before it hit the waves.

How could they? How could they keep on like everything was normal, when the world had just lost such a sweet storybook reader, such a talented artist, such a dedicated community servant, such a faithful friend? How could they not pause, how could the world not pause, even if just for a moment, to acknowledge the pain of this loss?

Of course they didn't know. They didn't know her. And even if they had, even if we were all mourning the same loss, we would all do it differently.

Mary comes to the tomb. The tomb is in the garden, so she comes there, but everything green and growing around her is blurred by her tears. She comes to mourn, to keep proximity to her pain. She comes because, though Jesus has been killed, her love for him still lives, and despite the urge to despair, she remains faithful to that love. This is how she mourns. When she learns he isn't there, she leaves only to let others know, then returns to keep vigil.

The other disciples come at her call and leave again, unsure what to make of the moment. Their response is understandable: they don't understand. Mary doesn't, either—what's happened is beyond understanding—but she remains rooted right there, refusing to cede the ground, or her love, to the empire that has tried in so many brutal ways to claim it all.

And her rootedness gives way to revelation. A gardener, a stranger, approaches and speaks her name, and that tender call begins the first conversation of the resurrection. When she hears herself known, Mary recognizes the one tending the soil as the one who tended to her own soul. Her grief becomes complicated by surprise, by confusion at the contradiction, by joy at the reunion. The fear and despair that linger in the aftermath of the crucifixion aren't denied or erased—the death-dealing empire still looms large—but this intimate moment is an indictment of violence and all its attendant horrors. The love shared here—the care exchanged between Mary and her teacher, her friend, her Savior—proves itself stronger than any other power.

The empty tomb Mary found wasn't the end of the story, but an invitation to keep her mind and heart open. Though empire might do all it can to capture our imagination and close us off from hope, we do not belong to the powers of fear, greed, and domination. We belong to the story of a woman whose quiet courage becomes joyful proclamation when Love rises, in spite of everything, to keep its promise of enduring presence and abundant life.

We all mourn differently. But we all mourn. And resurrected Love meets each of us where we are, calls us by name, and invites us to participate together in the work of sacred imagination: the care, the communing, the justice, the joy, that are forever remaking the world in the image of Love.

Reflection Questions

1. What do you do with your sadness? How do you mourn? What is helpful to you?
2. What are some realities you, or your community, are currently mourning?
3. Where do you see love countering the forces of empire in your community today?
4. What are some ways you want to participate in the work of imagination?
5. This Easter, what is your resurrection hope?