

Land Sick

Rev. John Allen

In High School I spent part of two Summers on long sailing trips. Once, I did not set foot on solid ground for a 10 days. I never got seasick. But I did get land sick.

Land sick was the name I gave to the uneasy feeling I—and others—get after a long time on the water, where even the solid earth feels like it is moving beneath your feet. Your mind gets so used to the pitch and sway, that it takes time for your brain to catch up to your body.

It takes time to really believe that the earth beneath your feet is reliably solid.

Maybe you know that sensation.

Maybe you have felt it coming off a boat, or a rollercoaster.

Or maybe you know this sensation. Walking through a crowd after you just received news that shifted your world on its axis.

I was at the Planet Fitness on 125th St. and Lenox Ave. in New York when I got a phone call telling me that my grandmother had died. I had stepped off the treadmill to take it, and I remember the dizzying sensation of holding such tender grief surrounded by others who were in their routine, as I had been moments before.

Walking home down crowded city streets, I felt maladapted to the ordinariness around me.

I sometimes wonder if the women walking to the tomb felt land sick.

Like their hearts were pitching and heaving with a grief and a fear that the world around them was just oblivious too.

As they carried the spices to anoint his body, did they notice the women who had come out to draw water, the children sweeping the steps, the gardener arriving for another day's labor?

Did it feel strange to see the sunrise on time, when the rhythms of their own lives had been so shattered.

Did they catch themselves forgetting that he was really gone?

Or maybe not. Maybe after three days, the pain was fresh, but familiar. Maybe they were beginning to find their footing in the world without him. Their teacher. Their brother. Their friend.

Perhaps they were getting used to the idea that he was really gone.

But nothing a human heart could conjure, nothing a human mind could imagine, could have prepared them for the way their world was about to shift again.

Because when they came to the tomb, it was empty.

This massive stone rolled away. And the grave clothes neatly folded.

Their minds went to the most natural place first. Someone took him. Those who deprived him of dignity in the final moments of his life now sought to rob him even of a decent burial.

But no. Soon Mary would see him. Hear him call her name. She would run to tell the others. Who had their own doubts, but would see him too. And overtime, they came to believe it.

He had risen.

What was it like to walk through town after *that*?

As Mary ran past people running errands, as she ran to see the disciples. She must have felt like she was on another planet.

I wonder how often she caught herself doubting that she really saw what she saw. Half-expecting to wake up from this dream.

Her heart pitching and heaving with joy that made the world around her blur.

Newfound hope can be just as disorienting as grief.

It can leave us just as unsure of the ground beneath our feet.

I think we are all learning that now.

As we each know more and more folks who have been vaccinated. As we venture back into each others lives, and maybe even into each other's homes.

Back to some familiar activities and places, schools, offices, planes...

How does it feel to think about these things? To step toward them? Joyous no doubt.

But I also imagine we will be feeling a bit land sick.

We've been tossed about for so long, it will be hard to trust that the ground beneath our feet is solid again.

It takes our minds and our spirits longer to feel safe, even after the threat to our bodies recedes.

It takes us time to adjust to a world that has shifted beneath our feet more than once in the last year.

I expect that what will come next, after the acute crisis of this pandemic that we are all just doing our best to survive, will be a time of land sickness.

A time where we are all learning to trust the hope we feel. A time when we are all learning to believe that the ground is solid. That the air is safe to breath. That our friends are safe to hug.

Some of us will find our stride after a few steps. Some of us will be wobbly for a while. We will need to be gentle and gracious with each other as we all get used to whatever this new normal looks like, and feels like.

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There are several stories in the gospels that come after the one we remember today. Stories of encounters with the risen Christ. Disciples meet him, in a locked upper room, on a road, on a beach...

And almost all these encounters begin just like Mary's encounter in the garden.

They don't recognize him.

They don't recognize him until he does something so recognizable. Like call them by name, or break bread...

Unlike Mary, these disciples have heard that Jesus has risen. They know it happened. But their minds and spirits are catching up. And they are still not quite able to embrace that hope enough to see it when he is standing right in front of them.

And at least one of them, Thomas, would not believe it until he touched Jesus' wounded body with his own hands.

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Sometimes when we sit with these biblical stories, they might seem like they are a world away. There is so much unrecognizable about the setting of these stories, that it is easy to forget.

It's the same world.

The world in which we are trying to learn to trust our safety. The world in which we are struggling to adjust to feeling hopeful again. The world in which our legs are wobbling and our hearts are uneasy. The world in which we grieve. In which our hearts break open.

It is the same world in which Jesus who died, lives again.

It is the same world through which the women walked in the dark to a tomb, and ran through daybreak to proclaim world-transforming hope.

It is the same world where grief sick Mary mistook Jesus for the gardener, and dazed disciples saw him only as a stranger on the road.

It is the world in which he called her by her name.

In which he was made known to them in breaking bread.

In which he let Thomas plunge his fingers into his wounds so that he might believe.

Which means that we are trying to find our balance in a world that has already been remade by this story. We are learning to trust hope in a world where we have already been shown that God's love will speak last and loudest of all.

And if we can root ourselves in *that* hope; we can face anything.

Never forget that we are pitching and heaving, yes. But we are pitching and heaving in a world that has already been remade by God's grace.

And we are learning again to be truly hopeful. But we are learning hope in a world already marked by the greatest imaginable hope.

And we are feeling wobbly, and uncertain, and unstable.

Yet in Christ we have a teacher. a friend. a brother. a savior. Who will meet us on the road.

Who will call us by our name.

Who will nourish us with what we need to finally believe.