

Title: “Stillness of Control”

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Epistle: Revelation 7:9-17
Gospel: Mark 15:33-40

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Overview:

Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James weren't close enough to see the full rage and the activity at the cross. And if they could have looked passed all of that to Jesus what they would have seen in that stillness was a God in full control.

Lesson:

We have a God whose love wanted to save us and whose control carried it out. We respond by turning our own lives over to Him.

Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

I was born in Michigan but spent my youth in New Mexico, in an area known as the “Four Corners” because of how the geographic borders of the neighboring states met at one point. I lived in the outskirts of a little town of about 5000 people that was situated about 10 miles from a much larger town of about 100,000. Outside of those areas, there was nothing. Well, not exactly nothing: there was dirt, and cactus plants, tumbleweeds, and rattlesnakes, and scorpions, and tarantulas, and did I mention dirt? But all of those were only visible when you looked down during the day; when you looked up, during the night, you could see the stars. Even as a kid who appreciated absolutely nothing, I appreciated those stars. I have never seen anything like them since. Because that whole area of the country lacked more than a couple of towns, there were no city lights to trespass on Heaven's show. It was unbelievable. I saw the Milky Way as bright and prominent as imaginable; I saw stars that really did cover the entire sky. I remember trying to find a spot, any spot of any size void of a star. Some were clearly larger and brighter than others, but they all were suspended over me like a blanket of peace and security.

And I bring this up because in our Gospel reading today, we recount the death of Jesus. And in verse 40 we read “⁴⁰There were also women looking on from a distance, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome.” Mark notes that these women were not close to the action but had instead looked on from afar. And when I read this, it took me back to my youth on the mountainous plains of New Mexico in the evenings. As I looked upon those stars, all I saw was the peaceful glowing of light radiating from each one. Like both Marys', I wasn't close enough to see the rage and activity of the

stars. From where I stood, I couldn't see the explosions and the eruptions - the nuclear fusions that slowly destroyed the star and sent its light across the universe.

And Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James weren't close enough to see the full rage and the activity at the cross. From where they stood, they probably couldn't see the pain on Christ's face or see with any detail his disfigured body. They probably couldn't hear Jesus cry out to his Father, and they probably didn't hear him breath his last breath. From where they stood what they saw was only a glimmer of all that was happening not too far from them.

And what they also missed, not because of their distance from the cross but because of their distance from God, a distance that was being reconciled in front of their very eyes, was control. If they could have looked past the cross, past the pain, and past the blood, to the man hanging there, what they would have found, what they would have seen was Christ in complete control. And even in the stillness of his death, even then he maintained control.

This is the thought that I am reminded of every Christmas, especially when I receive cards that show the manger scene with the heavens full of stars as the backdrop. I think back to the stillness of the New Mexico sky and continue back to imagine the sky behind Christ as he sacrificed himself for my sake. I imagine even further back to what that sky must have felt like on the first night of Jesus' birth. And I go back even farther and image the stillness of the heavens just after God created them. And what I see in the stillness of all of those heavens, across all of that time, is a God whose love wanted to save us and whose control carried it out. And I respond by falling on my knees this Christmas season and I worship the baby Jesus, my king and my Lord. And the gift that I bring to him is control over my life. I hand it to him because I know that I can't calm my own troubles, I can't quiet my own shame, I can't bring peace to my own turbulent life. I hand it over to him because I know that he can, the God of all and over all, the God who controls all, will bring the comfort and the stillness that I'm searching for. What about you? Will you bring him control over your life, too?

Let's pray.

In your name we pray. Amen.