

to remain on the side of the road. Still others plant memorial trees at the sites of fatal accidents. Joyce Keeler much prefers the garden over the roadside memorial. "Things like that get old, and the flowers fade," she says. "But this will never go away."

Long ago, a mother lost a son. It's unlikely, however, that she went back to the place where he died. Not much chance she wanted to sit by the cross on the hill which was the instrument of her son's cruel and painful death. She'd been there to witness it. Where would she go to remember? Should she erect a memorial in his memory in his hometown of Nazareth, or in Bethlehem where he was born? Should she post a sign at the site of some of his most famous miracles? Should she turn the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus into a shrine in his honor?

Her people, after all, had a strong tradition of building memorials. The patriarch Jacob set up memorials to mark decisive events in his life (Gen. 28), as did Joshua after crossing the Jordan (Jos. 3, 4). Surely, the thought crossed her mind: "How can I remember my son? How can we *all* remember him?"

Perhaps, she'd heard from the disciples that on the night before he died, her son, talked about being remembered. They'd eaten together, and then Jesus took some bread and gave it to the disciples, said a brief prayer of thanks, and told them to take it and eat it. "This is my body, which is given for you," he said. "Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19).

We don't know if Mary ever visited the tomb where they laid Jesus after he died. We cannot know the agony she endured from Friday to Sunday morning. We don't know what plans she made to memorialize his life, because on Easter morning the news came: the tomb is empty! Mary would never need to visit a cross or a tomb! Mary would never need to erect a pile of stones! Mary would never need to maintain a museum! Mary would never need to plant a garden! Mary's son, who was dead, was alive!

While Mary, Jesus' mother, may not have felt like she needed to go to the tomb that first Easter morning, two other Marys did. The very same instinct that drives people to the site of a crash may have carried Mary Magdalene, a close disciple of Jesus, and Mary, the mother of James and Joseph, to the tomb early in the morning. They came not with a handmade sign and flowers, but with oils and spices. They came not to set up a roadside

memorial, but to care for the body of the one they followed, the one who loved and accepted them when no one else did. They came prepared to do the only thing they could think of to honor the memory of Jesus.

It's a normal reaction, this need to take care of, to tidy up, to do something! Steve Lopez knows that instinct. He tends a roadside memorial in Arizona where his wife, daughter and granddaughter died in a 1999 traffic accident. He comes periodically to pull weeds and clear litter from that spot where his life changed forever.

After every winter storm, Brad Tackett shovels snow from a roadside memorial in Queensbury, New York, that honors the memory of a high school classmate who died in a crash. Others come when the weather is better to mow and remove weeds.

Like Mary and Mary, it is all they can think to do. They want people to know they remember and care. But the Marys never get to their task. Before they can get to Jesus' body, they're greeted by an angel who tells *them* no memorial is needed. Jesus, the one who was crucified, is raised from the dead. He is no longer in the tomb.

In their confusion, the Marys run to tell the disciples what they have seen and heard. Along the way, they are met by the resurrected Jesus. They want to hold onto him, to worship him. But Jesus instructs them to find the disciples and tell them to meet him in Galilee. The one they thought was in his final resting place is instead on the move. He's still calling them to follow him.

Our instinct to mark and remember upheaval, crisis or life-changing events is a good one. As noted earlier, marking the places where significant, life-altering events occur is an ancient practice. After his dream of a staircase between heaven and Earth, Jacob marked the spot. He took the stone he had used for a pillow that night, stood it on end, poured oil on it - an act of anointing - and named the place. He wanted to remember what had happened there (Gen. 35:7).

Mary and Mary went to the tomb of Jesus to mark the spot where their lives had changed. They wanted to remember and honor the one who had so significantly altered the trajectory of their lives.

On Easter Sunday, we, too, come to remember the moment when life changed forever. We come to remember that Jesus, the one who cares for us, who loves and accepts us, is raised from the dead. He is alive! Death is defeated. Life wins. No memorials are needed, save one: our lives.

By following Jesus, by giving him our lives, we offer living memorials to Jesus Christ, the Lord of Life. There are hints of this in the New Testament. The apostle Paul wrote to believers in Rome who were following Jesus, "I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, *to present your bodies as a living sacrifice*, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom. 12:1-2).

For the ancient disciples, following Jesus did not end at the cross; they followed Jesus even after the resurrection. In Galilee, their home, the place where he had first called them, where their journey with Jesus had begun, he would give them further instructions. This was their memorial. They were to follow, to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to heal the sick, to visit the lonely, to baptize, and to make disciples. They had work to do, and all their work would help them to remember and to honor.

Jesus likewise calls us to follow him in the places we know: to follow him in work, at school, with our families, in conversation with our friends, and in our ministry to our communities. The one who shows us resurrected life calls us to share that new life with others. We're to tell others about what he has done for us and to offer them the love, grace and healing we have received from him.

We honor Jesus best when we remember where our lives changed forever. We celebrate Jesus best with a changed, resurrected life. Jesus is alive and calling us to follow him still today. Death is defeated. Life wins. No memorial needed.

Prayer: O God, on Easter the thunder of your voice caused the stone to roll away from Christ's tomb. Make the ground shake beneath us, so that our feet shall dance, so that we shall leap up and run out the door, and carry love to a waiting world. Amen.

No Memorial Needed

Sunday, April 23, 2017

The Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

Matthew 28:1-10

It's a tragic scene: a roadside cross, bouquets of flowers, perhaps some candles, a stuffed animal or a sports jersey. Sometimes there's a hand-painted placard with a name and a date. You drive by and get a quick glance, but you know there was a moment on this highway when something horrific happened and someone lost their life.

Unfortunately, highway deaths and roadside memorials - called *descansos* from a Spanish word meaning "to rest" - have become so common that some states are seeking alternatives. Joyce Keeler knows the pain of losing a loved one in a tragic automobile accident. Nearly 30 years ago, her son lost his life on a rural road in Delaware. For Joyce, driving by the site of the accident is still too painful. She avoids it, even all these years later.

Instead, Joyce goes to the Delaware Highway Memorial Garden at the Smyrna Rest Area near her home. Among the trees, shrubs and flowering plants, is a pathway lined with memorial bricks that bear the names of those who lost their lives on Delaware's roads. In the center of the garden is a pond with goldfish, frogs, water lilies and a waterfall. Tucked amid the busyness of nearby highways U.S. 13 and Delaware 1, it's a peaceful place to remember and reflect. To honor the memory of her son, Joyce sits quietly near the brick that bears his name.

Patrick Bowers, whose 21-year-old son died in a crash in 2008, also frequents the Delaware Highway Memorial Garden. "It's not morbid or gloomy, not like a feeling you can get at a cemetery," he says. "It's a garden like someone would do in their backyard."

Delaware is one of several states providing alternatives to roadside memorials because traffic safety officers worry they are a dangerous distraction to drivers, and put those who maintain them in harm's way. In most states, *descansos* are illegal, but officials rarely enforce those laws. Several states implemented sign programs that offer a safer option to mark the site of a crash. Others adopted laws limiting the time a memorial is allowed