

The Day of Resurrection – Easter Sunday

April 1, 2018

Mark 16:1-8

The Rev. Carenda Baker

“In the name of the Holy One who goes ahead of us to Galilee.” Amen.

The three women walk together, arm in arm. The air hangs close and still, heavy with sadness. They journey on, at every turn reckoning with the power of death – his death. Their Lord and Master has been crucified and sealed in a cave where already his body awaits the onset of decay. Their devotion is focused on a corpse they will, with reverent grief and faithful love, anoint. They know their first challenge will be finding a way to roll the stone away from the entrance to the tomb.

This much, you surely have heard in countless Easter sermons. But Mark’s account of the first Easter ends abruptly at verse 8: **“So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.”** It leaves the reader hanging with an unsettling ending. There is a gnawing incompleteness here, a gospel crying out for a finished, more complete and polished ending, which scholars believe, was later provided by writers after Mark, because what we have in these eight short verses just doesn’t seem, well – very faithful, does it?

The women were gripped with shock and awe at what they found that morning. They didn’t heave a huge sigh of relief. Didn’t experience the tingle of excitement or the lift in their hearts from unbounded joy. They didn’t break out in praise with a string of hallelujahs. Their reaction is not polished. It is so very human – riddled with fear, terror, amazement. Easter scared these women. **“They ran from the tomb in fright, and said nothing to anyone.”** They fall silent, a natural response when one experiences a sudden revealing of God’s presence and power. Something holy and intensely unsettling is going on here.

Those women never read an Easter gospel. They know only that they saw Jesus die. Saw his lifeless body wrapped in linen, laid in this very tomb. They know what they had

seen on Friday. They know death is the end of existence. And they know what to do about death, how to care for the details surrounding death. But now, what they had believed about death, the reality they trusted, is shattered. In one incredible event, the world as they knew it ceased to be the same. And they do not know what to do with this. When our world is turned upside down, our natural human reaction is fear. New life is frightening! The women at the empty tomb were confronting a sea change, a radical rearranging of reality. They run into it head-on, with fear and uncertainty, not joy and a song of praise on their lips.

IF the women had gone to the tomb that morning and found the body of Jesus there, they would have anointed it with the spices they brought. They would have wept and prayed. Then they would have gone home, and their lives would have continued according to their expectations. And maybe deep down, a part of them would have felt relieved that the whole ordeal was finally behind them and they would no longer be burdened with the challenge of costly discipleship.

But they did *NOT* find the body there. They found a young man, who we assume was an angel, though Mark doesn't say so, telling them that Jesus, who was crucified and dead, had been raised. ***"He is not here."***

By raising Jesus from the dead, God has called humanity into a radically new kind of life, a life with altered rules, different from the rules under which the world normally operates. The story of Jesus, the risen Christ is not ultimately about his fate in the hands of his enemies. It is about what God has done in and through him. The normal patterns of life and death have been forever disrupted by One who can undo the power of death, One who has the cosmic power to take away death's sting.

Resurrection means God has broken the strangle hold of evil, sin, and death over us. Resurrection means God is determined to stick with us and to allow nothing in all creation to separate us from holy Divine love. In that assurance we can live and die at peace. In that assurance we can lay our loved ones who have died to rest in the arms of the God who created them. In that assurance we can face the future with confidence and courage.

Mark's Easter gospel challenges us to live with that confidence and courage. Mark is perhaps the most demanding of all the gospel writers. For those who hear and read Mark's gospel, the acid test of the Resurrection's effect upon us has to do with whether or not we can live into this good news and show it in our lives.

Easter calls us to a way of living, much harder and riskier than the old way of Good Friday. It's breathtaking and daunting, and many choose to remain in a Good Friday world. Mark's gospel depicts Jesus' disciples as very human, frequently failing to understand Jesus and his mission. They flunk test after test as his followers. Yet, God insists and persists in forgiving human failures, and continues working in and through us despite our fumbling and falling. Our formation and transformation as Easter people means learning to look through faith with Easter eyes, our eyesight sharpened by Christ's Resurrection light. Easter eyes see God's possibilities around every bend, especially where human impossibility has drawn its own limited conclusions. Easter eyes focus on hope in the face of despair. Easter eyes refuse to accept the cynical judgments of experience and collective wisdom. Easter calls us to live now, not for the old expectations, but for the new surprises God will bring.

Easter is more than just a sad story with a happy ending. More than an innocuous blip in history that we celebrate by pulling out the stops one spring Sunday every year. Our risen Lord and this world need us to move beyond silence and find our voices, recover our voices, lift our voices and share this Resurrection message with the world. We have been rescued and freed from sin and death and despair in order to live and give away God's saving grace, hope, and love.

The Resurrection has consequences. So what are some of those consequences for us? First, we are invited to live like we believe God's grace and power cannot be thwarted. Live like we believe God is in the business of raising the dead and can roll away the things that loom large and forbidding in front of us, things that block out new and abundant life.

Second, we dare not hang around the empty tomb. It might be comfortable there, even serve as our personal comfort zone, but the One who is life and love is no longer there.

Listen again to what those women were told by the young man who met them at the empty tomb: ***“. . .Go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.”***

We have to go away from the tomb, prepared to meet Jesus in Galilee. Galilee. That was the women's home, that's where their life was. That's where everything that mattered most to them happened. Jesus will now meet them and fill their tomorrows, wherever they go. He is not just in their past anymore, but at the edge of every present moment. There is now no time and space they can call all their own. There is no place that Jesus will not be – with them and for them.

In the Orthodox icon of the Resurrection, Jesus is never by himself. He is always depicted taking the dead by the hand and pulling them out of their own tombs. We cannot hide from the risen Lord behind our willfulness and doubt, for he will not stop seeking us, reaching out a hand to pull us out of our dead places. We cannot protest that our failures, guilt and shame exclude us from him, for he will not stop forgiving us. We are not safe behind our pride and resistance, for Christ will keep on loving us until those walls crumble from the intense heat of Divine Love. We are not protected by our comfort and ease, for Christ keeps showing us his wounded hands, feet, and side. We cannot withdraw securely into selfishness, for Christ will keep meeting us in our neighbor - in the poor, the sick, and the dying. The best option we have, as Easter people, is to humbly bow before Christ our Wounded Lover, and pray for the grace to begin looking at the world with Easter eyes, living as those who have already been raised from the dead with Christ.

“You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here . . .he is going ahead of you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.”

Easter morning compels us to move out of the graveyard toward Galilee, the place Jesus has promised to meet us. I believe it's where those three women, in awe and disbelief, in shock, in faith, headed. We wouldn't have this story if they had not gone on

to Galilee, and eventually told others about their experience of meeting a risen Lord there, as he promised.

So, I don't know about you friends, but I'm heading back to Galilee! I hope and pray you're headed there too, because a tremendous, yet unfinished gospel story waits to be written in each of our lives as we meet the risen Christ, who is waiting, eager to share with us what's next. Let's leave our past to God's mercy. Let's leave our future to God's direction and discretion. The Lord calls us to live *now*, in this present moment – the only time when God brings forth new life. Let's be bold and look with Easter eyes, gratefully and joyfully accepting God's grace at work in us and in the world around us. Mark has written us into a humdinger of a cliffhanger. Jesus' Resurrection was not the ending. It was only the beginning.

Alleluia - Christ is risen! The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Amen.