

April 1, 2018

Festival of the Resurrection of our Lord - Easter Sunday

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GOSPEL

Mark 16:1-8

The holy gospel according to Saint Mark, the sixteenth chapter.

Glory to you, O Lord.

¹When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint [Jesus' body]. ²And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. ³They had been saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" ⁴When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. ⁵As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. ⁶But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. ⁷But 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." ⁸So 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.

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

Alleluia! Christ is Risen!

Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Alleluia! Christ is Risen!

Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Alleluia! Christ is Risen!

Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!

It is amazing...and it is true...Death is defeated. And everything that separates us from God and one another has been turned inside out and upside down. The

final word that holds us in fear, is no longer the final word. Life and love have won.

And here we are to sing and shout...surrounded by brightness and beauty. Here we are, drawn together by this good news and this celebration...a community of joy.

We've heard what happened those many many years ago...which is true again today...and yet...and yet...

When we listen to how the story goes in Mark's gospel...it makes me wonder...how did we get from there to here? How did we come from that day to this one?

Because...we have heard the good news of God in Christ Jesus. But who told?

Who told you? A parent, grandparent, teacher, friend...?

And who told them? What if we could trace the thread back...generation by generation...year after year...all the way to that cool morning by a stone tomb...where women gathered in grief and holy purpose?

Who told? Because Mark tells us... "They said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid."

Would you have said anything? Who would you tell? "I went expecting to find my friend...dead...to take care of his body according to our customs...but he wasn't there. And you wouldn't believe who was...if I told you..."

Afraid...I bet they were...

Imagine...walking up wondering who you'll be able to find to help move the stone...only to see it already set aside. Once you noticed that someone had been there before you...what would you peer into that cold cave expecting to see? (I'm not sure I would even be brave enough to go investigate at that point.

After all, the authorities didn't like Jesus...and being connected to him could mean danger, too...I might have turned tail and run, right then.)

The way Mark writes that moment goes by so quickly, but it is full of almost cinematic drama...I wonder if this isn't supposed to be a classic horror movie jump scare...They peak around the corner into the open space to the left of the door...but just when they turn the other way... right over their shoulder! There's a strange man! Just sitting there...silent...like he's waiting for them.

I wonder if he knew the women would be the ones to come. I wonder if he knew who he would be sending as messengers with the life-changing news. He does what he came to do, though. He tells them that Jesus is raised...and to go tell his friends...and Peter...

Now, that's an interesting thing...“go, tell his disciples *and* Peter...” Peter is somehow in a different category than the rest of the disciples now? Does the man in white know about Peter's denial? Does he not count Peter as a disciple anymore because of it? Does he put Peter on the outside?

Or is he saying that Peter is just in a different place than the rest of them? Like literally? Maybe they are all together, but Peter is somewhere else...so the women will have two stops to make to deliver the news...

I wonder why that would be, though. Did the others not want him to stay with them after what he did? I mean...they weren't much better...they ran scared. “All of them deserted him and fled” (Mark 14:50).

Or is Peter suffering a self-imposed excommunication? Is he alone and isolated in a place where his own shame has banished him?

We don't know...but we do know that the messenger sends the women...even to the one who denied his friend...who failed when it mattered the most.

The news isn't just for the ones who deserve it. The news is for Peter, too.

And the gift of this news isn't only sent to undeserving people. It is sent with undeserving messengers...or at least with messengers that would be seen as undeserving. The man in white at the tomb sends these women...to be the first witnesses...the first proclaimers of the resurrection...the first preachers of Easter...He sends them into a world that didn't then and often still doesn't now trust the witness of women. Unreliable...they would most certainly be called.

The women would have known it, too. "Who would believe *us*?"

But this is what God is doing...sending the good news with those whose voices weren't honored...to those who don't deserve it.

He is sending women to spread the word...even to Peter...he is knitting community together again...he is connecting people more deeply...healing divisions...and bringing honor to the dishonored ones. It turns out that the work of his resurrection, is a lot like the work of his life.

But the thing is...the women were overwhelmed...and afraid. They must have been able to imagine then even less than we can now...what the road between that tomb and everything that would come after might look like.

And *that* moment is where the earliest manuscripts of Mark's gospel end. That held breath of uncertainty and fear. This is the last page of the book. It is like the spinning top...waiting to fall...or not...the hero hanging off the edge of the cliff...the great battle still looming on the horizon. Mark ends the gospel leaving us wondering...but what next?

Later tellings added to the story. They wanted to tell what happened next...the story grew...the ending settled into greater certainty. But not at first.

What would we say around the campfire after that ending? "They said *nothing* to *anyone*...for they were *terrified*. The *end*." And the storyteller sits down.

But...but...then...how do *you* know the story? How does anyone know? If they didn't tell anyone, how did the story come to us? Who told?

Oh...wait...I get it...The story wasn't really over, was it? It kept going after the last page was written. Someone told. One of the women must have said something...and someone must have believed her.

And if the women found the courage...even though they knew there might not be anyone who would listen...If someone believed them even though the world thought they were nobodies...then maybe we can tell it, too.

And if they were sent to the disciples *and* to Peter...even though he was alone in his shame...then maybe the story is being sent for us, too...even if we feel like imposters in rooms full of good people who have their lives put together and aren't a mess and a half on Easter morning.

If you are trapped alone on your own island of shame or fear...the good news is sent to you, too.

If you are afraid no one will believe you, because you aren't anyone worth believing...then the story is precisely yours to tell.

This is exactly how God chooses to write this story...and draw people together.

And the book might be written. But the story isn't over.

So let's keep telling it. Because it is still changing everything.

Alleluia. Christ is risen!

Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Amen.