

Easter Sermon Year B 2018

Acts 10:34-43

Psalms 118:1-2, 14-24

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Mark 16:1-8

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This morning's Easter gospel comes from the Gospel of Mark. And scholars refer to the passage that we hear this morning as the original ending of Mark's gospel. In its earliest versions, Mark's gospel ended here. Others coming later felt the ending would be stronger with a little more text. And in fact there are two endings appended at a later date. Known appropriately as the shorter ending and longer ending of Mark. The longer ending contains the command, "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation." This used to be the text above the altar in the VTS chapel that burned after my graduation. It is the imprint on my class cross. A few sentences further in that appended ending and we hear that those who go out and preach will be accompanied by signs such as the ability to pick up snakes in their hands and to drink deadly things and not be affected. I have always been a little anxious when I hear of faith based demonstrations that are based on descriptions found in this text, knowing that it was added at a later date. We have no idea who added the text and so I have a hard time putting much stock in it and resist any calls to pick up snakes or drink poison.

And in the authentic original text, it ends as we just heard. "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." That last phrase "for they were afraid" in the Greek ends with the preposition, in Greek, "gar" and the word "for." That is how the Greek is written. In English we aren't to end sentences with a preposition. Which is why we don't say things like, "Where are you at?" etc.

So in ending the gospel with the preposition, in a sense the gospel seems incomplete. The tomb is empty and Jesus is risen, yes. But the rest of the story has yet to be told. For anticipates more. For what, we might ask?

The stunning, terrifying and amazing news shocked the first woman on the scene. They wondered what to make of the empty tomb. They were afraid. Time and connection with the risen Jesus would ultimately allay their anxiety, but initially they were stunned and unsure what to make of the scene.

On Easter Sunday morning everything changed. Jesus overcame death and the grave transforming the world's understanding of life and death.

Resurrection is the central thesis of Christianity. Yet, the story of resurrection is not limited to Easter Sunday so long ago. The good news that the Church has experienced is the ongoing revelation of Jesus is an ongoing experience in the lives of all of us. Resurrection is

characteristic of the Christian experience. Things that once were seen as dead can take on new life. The gospel story continues to be revealed, that is the good news of Jesus.

Lynchburg Grows for example. The first time that Bishop Mark Bourlakas visited St. John's after his consecration, I took him to Lynchburg Grows. I wanted him to see the miracle in our midst. He was surprised and really stunned. He said, "this is a story of resurrection, right here in our midst." And so it is. What once was dead and abandoned has risen and is giving new life and sustenance to the community around us. LG is just one example of new life coming out of death. In a sense the same story is true of the Yoder Center. The elementary school in Tinbridge Hill closed and yet out of that closure the Yoder Center came into being and continues to evolve and bring new life for that community.

The faithful women approached the tomb and Jesus was gone. That is the truth that empowered the church. From that fateful Sunday forward. The empty tomb was the beginning of a new story. A new understanding of life. It freed us from believing that we only go around once and so we have to grab for all the gusto we can. Jesus showed us the way to life in the nearer presence of God. That opens the doors of possibility for our lives as well. Suddenly. Mary Oliver asks the poetic question, "What will you do with your one wild life?"

So too, we are witnesses to resurrection in how we live our lives. What we dedicate ourselves to. Feeding the hungry through so many programs. Clothing the naked. Health care. Recovery programs. People struggling with addiction are many times on the way to death unless they are fortunate to enter recovery. The hosting of 15 weekly 12 step programs gives witness to resurrection in the lives of all involved.

You see your life is a critical piece of the ongoing story of the resurrection of Jesus. God has great hopes for each of us. Each of us has a critical role to play. We don't just come to hear the story. No, we come to clarify our role in the ongoing story of redemption and salvation. Your life may be the only gospel that another reads. In a saying attributed to St. Augustine, "Preach the gospel at all times and if necessary, use words."

Christ is risen indeed, and revealed in the lives of the saints, folks like you and me as we go about our lives. No act is too small. Mother Theresa, "We can do no great things, only small things with great love."

(Now our lives are intimately linked with Jesus and the nearer presence of God.)