

## **Easter Sunday March 31 2024**

### **Mark 16:1-8**

Alleluia, Christ is Risen. He is risen indeed, Alleluia!

My memory of Easter for most of my younger life, was an all day affair. By the time my older sister was in high school we would go to the youth sunrise service, then help serve Easter Breakfast. Following that my family would serve in some capacity at both the Easter Sunday services (8:30 and 11)- as acolytes, crucifers, in the choir, or ushering. Sometimes my mother would play the organ or conduct a joint choir.

Then, the fun began. Our church sent out small containers for each family to collect a special Lenten offering that was then used for some project for others. The contents of these cans or boxes would be counted after the second service on Easter. A process that took until the early afternoon. My father- as Treasurer or being on Finance Committee- would be there and so would our family. Once we were done (around 3-4 pm) we would go to Shoney's for Easter brunch.

I miss those Easters. Immersed in my faith, my family. It is especially hard for me this year with the death of my mother in November and my father in January. There have been other

deaths as well- Ric Marlatt, Ida Mae Harford, Joyce Cooper- whose service was just yesterday. College friends who have had their mother or father-in-law die recently. My brother-in-law's brother. And so, I come to you this Easter morning in a very real way, steeped in death.

And am welcomed by a Gospel that seems odd for Easter morning. Here in Mark, we have the women receiving the wondrous news that Jesus had been raised and was waiting them and the other disciples in Galilee. They flee the tomb in the grip of a quaking fear and bewilderment. Understandable as their expectation of meeting the harsh reality of death has been turned on its head. Instead, they encounter something that has never happened before- what was dead brought back to life. They have been told to go and share this good news! Go and tell! And instead, they tell no one. Because they are afraid.

Now, prior to this in the gospel, the disciples and others had no problems talking about other amazing things that had happened around Jesus. People healed, demons cast out, parables told. They bragged about these with great abandon, even when Jesus asked them to be quiet. But now... not so much.

Mark's is a grittier gospel. And I confess that I need that this Easter morning. Because I could so easily be stuck in the tomb. Stuck on Good Friday. Believe that death has won. My mom is

still dead. My father is still dead. And the women don't say anything because they are afraid. But...

But then I remember, in the same way that those first hearers of Mark's gospel, having this text read to them almost a generation after the resurrection of Jesus would remember- when they hear the women said nothing because they were afraid. I am standing here today. In an assembly of followers of Jesus. Because those women overcame their fear and spoke the wondrously improbable truth- that Jesus was no longer in the tomb but alive. Alleluia, Christ is risen. He is risen indeed alleluia!

I remember, I am here today, dressed in this white robe, bearing this stole, because my parents were not afraid to speak the good news. Because they took me to St. Mark's Lutheran in Charlotte, NC, each week, and prayed with me at home, and read me storybook Bibles and proclaimed their own faith in word and deed. I am here today as your pastor because they in their lives were not afraid to shout- Alleluia, Christ is risen! He is risen indeed alleluia!

I teach a class for the University of Dubuque LIFE Program. It's basically a Christianity 101 class. And I had a couple of students this past term who objected to taking the class. Felt like they were being forced to participate. Concerned about being indoctrinated. I let them know that even though I was a pastor,

the class was being taught from an historical perspective. To describe for them the history of the church.

I was prepared to be honest with them. To acknowledge that this Christian thing seems ridiculous. A dead guy raised!? Since when does that happen? To acknowledge that the church of Jesus Christ does not always live up to his command for us to love one another and love our neighbor in the same way Jesus loves us.

And even with that acknowledgment, as a follower of Jesus, I am not afraid to speak. To shout this ridiculous and wonderful phrase to the world- Christ is risen! Alleluia! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! And to believe that it is true. That it is fact.

And when I am afraid, when terror and amazement seize me and I am silent. When the task of living out my faith in word and deed seem to cost too much, might make my life a bit uncomfortable, threaten what I have. I remember the good news of God in this odd ending of the gospel of Mark. In what Paul Harvey might have called the rest of the story. That, in the end, the women spoke. They told the good news. Because here I am. Here you are! I remember the good news, that the message of the angel about the resurrection of Jesus was not just for those disciples who did not deny Jesus, but for Peter, too. Who just hours before had sworn an oath that he did not know Jesus. And

still, Jesus loved him. The message said, Peter- I will meet you in Galilee as well. How's that for the love of God in Jesus Christ?

I miss those Easter days of my youth. The warmer days of North Carolina, the organ booming and tympany playing. Voices raised in song and the press of shoulders at the communion rail. I miss my parents by my side, and going to Shoney's Big Boy, and feasting on jellybeans hiding under the fake grass in the baskets.

But I would not give up this Easter here with you. And the privilege I have of declaring with the women who were the first preachers of the gospel that Jesus is no longer in the tomb. That in his death and resurrection, we have been freed from all that binds us. Our addictions- by the power of Jesus' love and resurrection you have been loosed from that. Our devotion to other gods- by the power of Jesus' love and resurrection you have been set free from them. Our fear of death- yes it hurts when a loved one dies. But death does not win. It cannot stand because Jesus did not stay in the tomb but is risen. Alleluia!

This is a mess of an Easter sermon, and perhaps that is because I am still a bit of a mess of a pastor because of the journey through the valley of the shadow of death that I have been on these last months.

But, on this joyous Easter morning, I know my job. To proclaim to you the good news. That in Jesus of Nazareth, the reign of

God that is an ecosystem of other centered self-giving love has come near. Has brushed up against our lives. Has called us through the washing of the waters of baptism, the breath of the proclaimed Word on our cheek, reached through the Word on the page to grab our hearts.

And so I call you, I beg you, turn back from those other paths you are on. They can seem so good and enticing, but ultimately they lead only to death. Instead, trust in this reality- that in Jesus you have met your best life. That the purpose of your existence is to receive the love of God come to us in Jesus and to give it back to others.

Doesn't that sound like a wonderful life's work? To receive and give back to others a love that brings the whole world to life.

Do not be afraid my friends, of this wondrously improbably good news. Instead, join me in declaring the truth that saves our lives. Christ is risen! Alleluia! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!