

**Easter Sunday
April 1, 2018**

**In the name of the God of all creation,
The God alive in each of us as God was alive in Jesus,
And the power of God known in the Spirit.
Amen.**

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

The good news of Easter morning is that the abundant life that Jesus lived did not end with death, and could not be contained in the grave. Jesus lived as a blessed beloved child of God with such abundance that he gave himself away to include all at his table ... to bring wholeness to those who were broken ... to bring life to those who lived in despair. That abundant life took him to the cross, but death did not end that abundant life, and the grave could not hold it.

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The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!

We just heard Pastor Deena read the story of the resurrection from John's Gospel. You may have noticed that the lectionary insert also includes the story from Mark's gospel. It is just eight verses long:

When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. They had been saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But 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. But 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." So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to any one, for they were afraid.

After preaching Easter sermons for over 40 years I still try to read the texts as if I was seeing it for the first time ... and then to ask questions. In this case, there are a number of differences between the story in John's gospel and the story in Mark's gospel. There are differences also with Matthew's account of the Resurrection, and Luke story of the event as well. However, I want to focus on the differences we have in front of us.

- In John's gospel the women arrive at the tomb in the predawn darkness, yet in Mark's gospel they arrive after the sun has risen.
- In John's gospel the women, upon finding the stone rolled away from the entrance immediately ran to tell the disciples. In Mark's gospel the women encounter a young man in a white robe, but they were frightened and "they said nothing to any one, for they were afraid."
- In John's gospel the risen Jesus revealed himself to Mary Magdalene, while in Mark's gospel the young man told Mary that the disciples will find Jesus when they return to Galilee.

Why these differences? Which one is correct? Which one is true? And, for that matter, does it make any difference?

For me, it does not make a difference. As far as I am concerned, they are both true. They are both telling us that the grave could not hold the power of God in Jesus. The good news of Easter morning is that the abundant life that Jesus lived did not end with death, and could not be contained in the grave. That was true then ... and it is true today. This isn't just about how it happened two thousand years ago, but how do I know this to be true in my life today?

When I was growing up, the key Easter fact to proclaim was that Jesus rose ... Jesus rose physically, bodily, literally ... Jesus rose from the dead. As long as one believed in the factual historicity of the resurrection, they were safe. Later, I encountered other possibilities of understanding the Easter narrative. It made sense to me that the resurrection was not a literal historical fact, but a potent symbol of transformation, renewal, and rebirth. Whether or not Jesus physically rose again didn't matter ... his friends and followers experienced his continued presence, and that was enough. It wasn't a matter of either/or ... it was both/and. Both Mark's gospel and John's gospel are true ... and for that matter, so are the stories in Matthew and Luke.

According to all the gospel accounts, the resurrection happened sometime between sundown on Friday ... the beginning of the Sabbath ... and Sunday morning when the women arrive. The resurrection happened in total darkness. Sometime in the predawn hours of that Sunday morning, a great mystery transpired in secret. Whether the women arrived in darkness or sunlight isn't the issue. The fact is that the resurrection happened before they arrived ... in total darkness. No sunlight illuminated the event. No human being witnessed it. And even now, two thousand years later, no human narrative can contain it. It exceeds all of our attempts to pin it down, because it's a mystery known only to God. Whatever the resurrection was and is ... whether it be physical, literal, metaphorical, or symbolic ... its fullness lies in holy darkness,

shielded from our eyes. All we can know is that somehow, in an ancient tomb on a starry night, God worked in secret to bring life out of death. Somehow, in the utter darkness, God raised Jesus from death into new life.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!
Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia!

I noted that in John's gospel the risen Jesus revealed himself to Mary Magdalene, yet in Mark's gospel Mary is told that she ... and the disciples ... will see Jesus in Galilee. In fact, there are no post-resurrection appearances of Jesus in Mark's gospel at all. The Gospel of Mark is silent on this point. It just leaves us dangling.

If Mark's ending creates discomfort and uncertainty, it is partly due to our knowledge of how the Easter story is told in the other gospels. Easter is supposed to have post-resurrection appearances: joyful seaside meals, scenes of reconciliation and forgiveness, garden embraces of the risen Lord, and disciples' excited shout, "He is risen!" But Mark offers us none of these, choosing instead to end his story with the frightened women fleeing the cemetery in silence.

So, this Easter morning ... with these two different accounts of the Resurrection ... and with all the questions that may raise ... what is the real question I want to address? Again, I'm not so much interested in the details of what happened two thousand years ago ... we know Jesus was raised from the dead. The real question for me is "How do I know this story to be true in my own life today?"

So, in Mark's gospel the young man in the white robe told the women that they would find the risen Jesus when the disciples returned to Galilee. The question for me is: Why in Galilee? Why not in Jerusalem? Why not in the Temple? Or Mount Hermon where the Transfiguration took place? Or Mount Sinai where God had given the Law to Moses? Why Galilee? What was so special about Galilee?

What is so special about Galilee? Really ... there was NOTHING special about Galilee. And that's the point. There was nothing special about Galilee until Jesus got there. That was the way that it was in Galilee. It was a dusty, out of the way sort of place. Then Jesus came to Galilee, calling a few fisherfolk and others to follow him. People began leaving their homes, walking off good paying jobs, trying to act like disciples. Jesus shook things up in Galilee. Over four-fifths of Jesus' ministry occurred in Galilee. Then in the city ... in Jerusalem ... his ministry ended. But the young man in the white robe told the women his ministry will begin again ... yes, back in Galilee.

Mark's story is telling us is that Jesus will meet his disciples and those who have been following him in a rather ordinary place, a place where their discipleship began. At the beginning of the story Jesus had come out to where they lived, out to Galilee. He had called them first to follow him in Galilee. They had attempted to be disciples in Galilee.

Yet I wonder, on that first Easter, when they were told that they would see him back in Galilee, was the message of the young man at the tomb accepted as good news? In Jerusalem the disciples had betrayed, denied and deserted Jesus. Now, they are told to go back to Galilee and there they will meet him again. What will he say to them about their betrayal, denial, and abandonment? They won't know until they go back home, back to Galilee, until the risen Christ, who had gone on ahead of them, meets them there.

With the empty tomb ... with the Resurrection ... Jesus is now loose. He is not only loose, but he is loose in Galilee. Now there is no getting away from him, no keeping him safely tucked away in a tomb or cemetery, or forgetting him, or disposing of him in some far away exotic location in our consciousness. In spite of all of our efforts to describe the meaning and purpose of the death and resurrection of Jesus in vast libraries of theology, Mark's gospel story is telling us to open our eyes, and open our hearts, and open our souls in the ordinary life that we live every day. Jesus has been raised and he comes to where we live ... to ordinary life of our own Galilee.

The good news of Easter morning is that the abundant life that Jesus lived as a blessed and beloved child of God did not end with his death, and the grave could not hold it. That is good news for us today. We are blessed and beloved children of God invited to live that same abundant life. A life so abundant that we include those who are marginalized. A life so abundant that we comfort and bring wholeness to those who are broken. A life so abundant that we can give hope to those who live in despair. And even after death ... those emotional and spiritual deaths that invade our lives while our hearts still beat and blood courses through our bodies ... even after death that abundance lives on ... the grave cannot hold it.

The Resurrection is not just something that happened once out at the cemetery. That would be all too easy. The Resurrection is something that happens all the time. The Resurrection is something that meets us in the world ... in our own world of families, relationships, jobs, school, church, and the ordinary places like Galilee. This morning we celebrate the Resurrection with glorious music and beautiful flowers in this marvelous sacred space. Yet Mark is telling us that we will find Jesus not just here, but in the ordinary lives we live after we leave this sanctuary. Mark is telling us that we will find the risen Jesus in our homes, as we gather with our family, as we walk in our neighborhoods, as we drive down the street to the supermarket. Our own Galilee is that place where our own ordinary life is lived ... at school, on the job, in this community of faith. It is out of those places that we were called to a life of abundance by taking seriously what Jesus took seriously. And, it is there that when we open our spirits we will find the new life of the Resurrection ... in all its abundance.

The empty tomb. Two stories this morning ... one in John ... the other in Mark. In John the women arrive in the dark ... and the story is mysterious. In Mark the women arrive after daybreak to find a young man in a white robe. In John the risen Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene. In Mark there are no post-resurrection appearances ... just the promise that the disciples will find Jesus back where their life with him began ... just the promise that we will find Jesus in the ordinary places of our own lives.

Which story is true? Does it make a difference? I say that they both are true! The good news of Easter morning is that the abundant life of Jesus did not end with his death, and the grave could not hold it. The good news is that same life is available to all of us. A life so abundant that we include those who are marginalized. A life so abundant that we comfort and bring wholeness to those who are broken, hurt, and grieving. A life so abundant that we can give hope to those who live in despair. This community of faith called St. Cyprian's is an example of that. We are an Easter people. We are a people of the Resurrection. We know what it means to live in the resurrected life ... in our little corner of ordinary Galilee.

Amen.