

Easter Sunday, April 4, 2021

Introduction

Christ is risen! Jesus is alive, and God has swallowed up death forever. With Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome, we may feel astonished and confused, unsure of what to make of the empty tomb. But this is why we gather: to proclaim, witness, praise, and affirm the liberating reality of Christ's death and resurrection. In word and feast, we celebrate God's unending love, and depart to share this good news with all the world. Alleluia!

Readings and Psalm

- [Acts 10:34-43](#)

God raised Jesus on the third day

- [Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24](#)

This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. (Ps. 118:24)

- [1 Corinthians 15:1-11](#)

Witnesses to the risen Christ

Gospel – Mark 16:1-8

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.

Sermon

Alleluia! Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed! Yes, but that seems to be all that the end of our gospel text is telling us today: Christ is risen. End. The women are astonished and afraid, and this ending of Mark seems more like the middle of the story than its end. What about appearances of the

risen Christ? What about the joyful proclamation that death has not had the last word?

What do we do with that? Now what?

Well, if we look at the gospel plus our other readings, the story is told as we know it. The gospel tells us what happens right after Jesus' resurrection, then the Acts texts tells us that Jesus appeared to the disciples after being raised from the dead and then what Jesus told the disciples their mission was, which is to testify about him to everyone.

And also, in the 1 Corinthian's text we get an important part of the message:

That we today gather as well with those Paul cited to encounter the risen Christ. You are part of the story too.

Now what?

The message! What is the message of Easter? We said the texts tell the story but what is the message of the story?

Before I tell you, I want to tell you a little bit about my process of this sermon.

Every two weeks there is a bible study where some of the other ELCA pastors of the area meet. We check in with each other and talk about the gospel text. We basically brainstorm sermon ideas and understanding of the gospel text.

And at the last bible study we looked at this Mark text of course. And we were...mostly silent. Why? Were we tired? Were we distracted?

No, I think, because it's Easter, Jesus rose from the dead, we know. It's awesome, alleluia yes! But what is there to say...new? In what new and creative way could we tell the story of Easter?

So, we started brainstorming creative sermon ideas.

We came up with this idea:

Imagining someone who died, let's say a ghost, attending Easter service and hearing the Easter story in our church. You could imagine that it is the ghost of someone who forgot to leave after a funeral and who now hears the story of Easter. And they hear about the resurrection from the dead and get excited thinking it could happen to them.

At the end of the sermon, it would then turn out that they are not a ghost at all. They are a person who

goes to the Easter worship service and was not a Christian at the beginning of the service. But at the end of the service, they believe in Jesus and are risen with Christ, they heard the Easter story and believe! The resurrection did happen to them and now they are truly alive, they have a new life in Christ! And we are all invited to hear the Easter story and its promise through their ears for ourselves.

Ha, wouldn't that be creative, kind of like those M. Night Shyamalan movies like the Sixth Sense where there is a huge twist at the end. I personally find it difficult to watch his movies nowadays because all I am doing is looking for clues for the expected twist at the end.

But twist or not, since I told the idea to the story, you probably can figure out that I did not write my sermon like that. I might write it as a short story for next year's Easter newsletter.

The reason why I ended up not writing it, is because every Easter in my life that I went to church, I would often hear long, creative sermons. Pastors who wanted to pack everything into the sermon. Showing off all that they learned, showing

off their knowledge, and so on. Or trying desperately to dazzle the visitors who were not regular church goers in the hopes they would be so impressed by the sermon that they would come back to church the Sundays after Easter.

And every year, I would think: wait, did they even preach the good news of Easter? Did I hear that sentence, that sentiment that is central to Easter – no – that is Easter?

God loves the world so much, that God gave the only son, who suffered and died on the cross, who rose from the dead so we could be free. Free from sin, free from death and have eternal life.

Maybe we obsess too much as preachers, and as disciples testifying to Jesus' story, to make the Easter promise dazzling, creative, exciting, when in fact, it already is. The Easter promise is: Salvation.

This salvation proclaimed, as we said, throughout these texts we read today, and most clearly in Christ's resurrection, is not only about the end of

death. Resurrection is not just an escape hatch through which we will someday step into the afterlife.

Well, what is it then?

It is a sense of deliverance now, restoration, healing, hope, peace, strength, love, and yes, life. A new life.

We can know these now and also look forward to a continuation for our life beyond death because they all draw from the enduring mercy, love, and life of God.

In the Acts text Peter says: the good news through which we are *being* saved. Today, everyday, a continuation in this life. The good news *is saving* us. Not past tense.

The young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting there in our gospel text knows the women are looking for Jesus. Because the people of Israel, the Hebrews have been looking for him, the Messiah for a very long time.

Who is the God you have been looking for?

Are you looking for the one who brings you salvation? Are you looking for the one who loves you and died for you to save you?

If you answer yes, now what?

How do we sustain the feeling of Easter? The realization of salvation and acceptance of a new life?

The all-embracing love of Christ lives and labors in every moment, place, and circumstance – in every love, every beauty, every act of mercy and justice, every kindness, struggle, and hope, raising human beings and all creation into the fullness of life.

The end of the gospel of Mark seems more like the middle of the story. Maybe because we are the ones who are to continue the story.

You are invited to embrace the salvation that is offered to you and to tell the end of the story with your life, your actions.

Tell the story of the good news, how you experience God and where your hope lies.

The gospel text in Mark leaves an open end, open for you to go on your own journey with Christ to find and experience him.

Christ, the one who loves you, died for you, overcame death for you, and who will come again.

Alleluia. Amen