

“This IS the Day!”
Mark 16:1-8
Easter Sunday, April 1, 2018
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Mark 16:1-8 (NRSV) The Resurrection of Jesus

16 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. ² And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. ³ They had been saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?” ⁴ When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. ⁵ As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. ⁶ 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. ⁷ 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.” ⁸ 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.^[a]

Can you image “danger” in celebrating Easter?

You didn’t need a spoiler alert that the tomb was empty!

The danger comes, in knowing in advance, “what happens next” and in the complacency of not being in AWE of the empty tomb!

If we’re not careful, Easter can become just another happy ending and we won’t be awed; we won’t get goose-bumps when we hear the ***almost*** unbelievable Good News.

That’s because familiarity can bring, at least, a ho-hum, “of-course-he-rose-on-the-third-day” kind of attitude.

And if we fall prey to THAT, Jesus’ death on the cross ceases to be a life-changing gift, and instead becomes a commercial celebration diluted with bunnies and baskets.

I saw a t-shirt reminding shoppers that “it’s not about the bunny; it’s about the Lamb.”

We don’t want to be complacent THIS morning after our deliberate season of Lent; many of us made the season quite fruitful!

Today, in the depth of our faith, it's important that we understand Easter and appreciate its ultimate PRICE after the pain and darkness of Good Friday and the quiet of Vigil Saturday.

When we remember, with humility, the sacrifice made for US, these last few days should show us things that shouldn't be glossed over or Easter WILL lose its goose-bump-producing, almost too-good-to-be-true aspects.

The empty tomb is THE first proclamation that Jesus IS alive.

The women, who were among the very few who stayed with Jesus until the end, knew he was dead. **That** was real!

For them, and all his followers, Jesus' crucifixion and death seemed like a crushing end, that all was lost and despite the promises they wanted to cling to, it **appeared** that Jesus and his cause had been defeated.

Yet, in spite of this *apparent reality*, those women stayed with him throughout the ordeal; even until after his death.

Despite their despair, (can you image) they went to his tomb early that morning with broken-hearts.

And these still-faithful women became the first to experience, THE AWESOME discovery that Jesus WAS NOT THERE.

What *would you* think?

They knew what he'd told them... but something...???

They didn't know what they were seeing. Which was an empty tomb.

Seriously, you go into a graveyard; expecting one thing.

That's emotional enough.

But then, when the ONE thing is COMPLETELY different from what you're expecting... What then? Terror? Or amazement?

I'm thinkin' "dumbfounded!"

The Message Translation says, "*They got out as fast as they could, beside themselves, their heads swimming! Stunned, they said nothing to anyone.*"

We know, they fled the tomb, they didn't understand.

No one understood what had happened.

These women were the first believers for whom it wasn't enough *just to know* that the tomb was empty.

The empty tomb doesn't prove the meaning of the Resurrection.

They've never experienced something "like this."

Ever been in a situation like that?

With a new spouse? Or the death of your beloved? Or a new baby; and every step and stage of *their* life?

The Resurrection really disrupted their world and the followers of Jesus find themselves in a whole new reality.

And, hear this: their experience **shows us** what else is necessary.

Their reality was that they had to face Jesus' death **AND** continue to stay true to him. **That** enabled them to live INTO the Resurrection.

It's in John's gospel actually, that we read about a face-to-face encounter with the Risen Lord. In John's gospel – Mary Magdalene KNOWS!

Factually, Mark's gospel ends abruptly with NOT knowing.

Commentaries tell us that MARK'S writing ends where Chopper stopped reading this morning. There are "additional" endings, short AND long; but scholars don't believe that those endings are original to Mark's manuscript.

The abruptness is probably MUCH LIKE what the women at the tomb were feeling.

Their experience WAS abrupt.

But, cause for awe!

They are witnesses to God's MOST POWERFUL demonstration of love.

What the world put to death, God raised high.

That, Dear Ones, is the meaning of Easter: that **God's love triumphs over every barrier.**

Easter means that no power on earth can destroy that reality!

The white-robed messenger IN the tomb, gives the first formal announcement that *“He has been raised; he is not here.”*

The women and the disciples that they’re sent to tell, IN THEIR **NEW** REALITY, have to discover that Jesus was alive//for them in a way they could never have imagined, in a way that will never end.

Mark’s gospel started with the words: “The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God...”

And these end verses bookend that sentiment.

The messenger told the women to go and tell the other disciples about the power of the Resurrection; that Christ was raised and had gone before them into Galilee. He was *sharing some REALLY good news!*

He said that they should quit looking for Jesus dead ‘cause they were going to find him alive in a new way, in the life of the world.

That was the meaning of the Resurrection.

And what they learned is FOR US!

- That despite our lack of commitment to God, God remains committed to us; in a loving, no-strings-attached kind way; even in ways we don’t deserve.
- That God has made US the most precious beings in creation and that we’re worth dying for.

Easter is coming face to face with a Jesus who has not only reversed the power death, but completely triumphed **over** it.

So what does the resurrection of Jesus Christ mean for us today?

Well, like the women who were dispatched to share the news with the other disciples; and those other disciples shared the good news with the world through outreach and loving service, WE can BE a longer ending of the Gospel!

The followers of Jesus began to live out the Maundy Thursday commandment:
“To love one another,” Jesus said, “as I have loved you. That is how others will know...because of how you love!”

Today is *the* day in **our** faith to proclaim that SAME fabulous news.
The Good News of the Resurrection is that Christ has experienced and overcome any darkness that life can cause...he’s overcome the kinds of things, brought by the enemies of God, that gobble us up.

Today, Dear Believers, we can declare that things are different.
We know we have the love and light of Christ going before us and living within us.
AND that we can follow Christ and dare to bring that love and light to the darker parts of our world.

The Resurrection WAS; it’s not a PAST miracle.
It is our present, LIVING reality and a source of our hope for this life and the eternal life to come.
The Resurrection should be, like Mary and Salome’s, our mission: TO GO AND TELL somebody, everybody that because of Jesus Christ WE ARE CHANGED!
And we SHOULD go back into our “everyday” worlds of work and school and yes, retirement, with confidence and courage, in a renewed and transformed way.
Don’t lose YOUR awe about the Resurrection!
Don’t fall into complacency and forget the goose-bumpy Good News!
But go, thankful because you’re filled with God’s love, and proclaim that Christ is risen.
He IS RISEN INDEED!