

Easter Day. April 1, 2018. Dungeness Valley Lutheran Church, Sequim, WA.
Acts 10:34-43, I Corinthians 15:1-11.
Gospel: Mark 16:1-8

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. 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.

Mabel and Lester die and go to heaven – heavenly banquet – he avoids the whipped cream, fat on meat, etc. – angels encourage to enjoy – He says, "Mabel, if it weren't for your lousy bran muffins, we could have been here ten years sooner!"

Alleluia! Christ is risen! (Congregation: He is risen indeed, Alleluia!)

This morning I woke up Bob by saying, "Honey, there's water all over the kitchen floor by the dishwasher!" Since we have had more than our share of water problems this year, he jumped out of bed just as I said, "April Fool!" and he was able to laugh and lie back down. Then I said, "Alleluia, Christ is risen!" and he replied, "He is risen indeed. Alleluia!"

Interesting coincidence this morning, isn't it! Some might smirk and say, "April Fool!" about the words that are the heart of our faith. Some call Easter the "big bang" of Christianity. On the other hand, some say the Easter story isn't necessary for us to still love and trust Jesus. And yet, as St. Paul said, the "message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." (I. Corinthians 1:18) He goes on, "25For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength."

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In today's Gospel it sounds foolish to hear that the women "said nothing to anyone" after finding no body in the tomb, and a young man in white sitting there telling them that Jesus was raised. But that's all Mark wrote.

How could Mark simply end his Gospel book that way? Scholars have wondered this for centuries and well-meaning scribes or church leaders have given the Gospel what they considered more appropriate endings.

But this is where the most ancient copies of this Gospel end. "The women said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid."

We can imagine the women being afraid, but neither you nor I can imagine these women saying nothing to anyone! Is it Mark's long-ago April Fool joke? In John's gospel, Mary Magdalene runs and tells Jesus' disciples. In Luke's gospel, the women tell, but the disciples dismiss their words as "an idle tale."

So...why did Mark quit where he did? Someone told something to someone – or we wouldn't all be sitting here this morning crying out "Alleluia! Christ is risen! (Congregation: He is risen indeed, Alleluia!)"

We are used to stories without endings, and so it need not bother us that Mark's women saying nothing to anyone is not the end of the story!

In the story of the prodigal son, we never learn if the older brother joins the party that Father threw for the disgraced but returning younger son. We don't know if the bridegroom at Cana ever learned who turned his water into wine. We don't know what was said to the young boy who offered his lunch to Jesus so that 5000 people could be fed. We don't know when Joseph, Jesus' stepfather died, nor exactly what Mary and John did after that first Easter.

And we don't know the ending to our own stories. We know that we will all die, but if we knew how or when, we could be clever with our investments, our long-term care insurance, our wills, and such. Truth be told, we don't know what will happen between now and this evening.

We are used to living with uncertainty.

What if Mark meant his ending to be just as he left it! An ending that is really a beginning. A beginning that starts with terror and alarm and goes on to give each of us a part to play.

There are, to be sure, all the reasons in the world to be afraid and uncertain, even terrified. We can tick them off on our fingers and not be finished counting.

And yet, when all the counting and agonizing is said and done, there is the overwhelming joy in knowing that Jesus – who suffered so innocently and so terribly – was indeed victorious.

It's like when you replay the game that you know your team has won. You feel the suspense, remember the anxiety and fear of loss. But, since you know the final outcome, there's nothing to worry about.

Richard Rohr talks about Jesus crying out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" as he faces the darkness and absurdity of life [and death]. His human mind had no reason to believe that God loved him or that his death had meaning. "At this moment Jesus fully and totally fell into the hands of the living God. And that is called resurrection." (from "We come to God by doing it wrong")

When we are faced with an accident, or a bad diagnosis, a break-up, a foreclosure, a job loss, a personal failure, we may, like Jesus, fall into the hands of the living God. And that falling, that death, when we turn everything over to God, becomes a resurrection.

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The young man in the tomb singles out Peter by name when he tells the women at the tomb to tell that Jesus is risen. Why mention Peter by name? In the night of Jesus' arrest, Peter had followed him from a distance, but, when accused of being one of Jesus' friends, he swore again and again that he never knew him. Then the rooster crowed and Peter remembered Jesus' words, "Before the rooster crows twice, you will have denied me three times." Peter went out and wept bitterly.

The young man at Jesus' empty tomb says to tell "his disciples and Peter." That could that mean the denying Peter was no longer considered a disciple. Or, perhaps, that of all of them, Peter especially needed to be told that Jesus is risen. In his despair, he had fallen into the hands of the living God. And the living God is a God of resurrection.

Now the Gospel writer invites us into the story.

How might it sound to you if you heard the words, “Go tell his disciples and Bill” or “his disciples and Louise” or Brenda or Paul or Jerry... – put in your own name. Go tell you and you and you that you will see him, just as he told you. And that a resurrected life is given. This is the blessed hope of Easter faith. That Jesus is present with us. That in him we are with those whom we have lost from this earth in a place we cannot fathom, a place/ a dimension / a heaven for all who wish to be with God.

Our Bible study group talked about Easter this week. They talked about having resurrection life here and now, of living abundantly, of Jesus drawing us all together as one, bringing us into community with all people, with the universe, giving us the shining image of hope beyond suffering, giving meaning for our lives – short and troubled as they may sometimes seem.

As we watch for the first green shoots and flowers of spring, God invites us to become aware of new life around us: new life each morning; being named in Mark’s Gospel in the mouth of the angel; being called forgiven; and expecting to see Jesus. Wherever healing is happening, wherever children are welcomed, wherever the hungry are fed, and wherever people are helped to see more clearly - that is evidence of God making everything new. God wants to bring us close, heart-to-heart, cheek-to-cheek, to offer new life, regardless of what we have done or left undone.

We need not be afraid to be the people Jesus continually invites us to be. To be the ones who turn and forgive others. To be the healed souls who reach out to one another with words of comfort and deeds of love. We need not be alarmed to give witness to our faith.

Walk out to our memorial garden today after worship. Read the verse inscribed above the names of those people who remain important to our church but no longer walk this earth. “For by grace you have been saved through faith. It is a gift of God.”

Give thanks for those lives remembered there. Give thanks for YOUR life. Give thanks that God can give us faith. Give thanks that we can laugh with the April fools, knowing that there is no foolishness in **these** words: Alleluia, Christ is risen! (Congregation: He is risen indeed, alleluia!) Amen.

