

3.31.2024 Resurrection of Our Lord / Easter Day

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Acts 10:34-43; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11; Mark 16:1-8

“He is going before you”

*Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Alleluia! Christ is risen. He is risen indeed, Alleluia! Today we join our voices with Christians around the world in every nation and language as we joyfully proclaim Christ’s resurrection. On this holy day, we celebrate the Easter faith of the church, as Paul writes, *“that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried and that he was raised on the third day.”* Like Peter, we are witnesses *“that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”* We live with the Easter hope each day, knowing that because Christ lives, we have forgiveness and daily share in his resurrection life.

The first apostles of the good news of Easter were the women who went early on the first day of the week to Jesus’ tomb. Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome went to the tomb to anoint Jesus’ body. His body had hurriedly been laid in the tomb because he died just as the Sabbath day was beginning.

On the way to the tomb, the women asked one another, *“Who will roll away the stone from the entrance to the tomb?”* Their question about the logistics of opening the tomb also suggest a very universal question each of us lives with: “who will open the grave into which I will be laid, and who will open the graves in which my loved ones have also been laid?” On Easter, we celebrate that Jesus Christ’s resurrection has rolled way the stone separating the living from the dead. Indeed, he himself has become the chief cornerstone and the Lord of the resurrection.

Today we celebrate not simply a miraculous event that happened to one man two thousand years ago. If that were the case, this story would have been forgotten long ago. What we celebrate is that Christ is alive, calling you, me, and all people to new life. To walk as Easter people is to know a living power that comes from him already alive in us through grace and faith. Easter is about Jesus raised and alive, always going ahead of us, leading, inspiring, strengthening and forgiving, so that we can live with hope for others, and so we might also one day die with confident hope that he is preparing a place for us.

The women at the tomb knew the finality of death that separates us from those we love. The care with which they carried spices to the tomb reveals their love for Jesus. Yet they encountered something so fantastic and so astounding that they were alarmed and awe-struck.

Instead of Jesus' body, they were met by a messenger, and like us today, they heard the good news that Jesus had been raised from the dead. Like us, they also had to believe in the good news that he had been raised. Like us, they grew into faith by following the living one who is always going ahead of us. Like us, they had to live into a faith that "goes and tells" others about him.

For me, the resurrection account in Mark's gospel is the most real because I can see myself in this story. Like the women hearing the good news, I also tremble, bewildered and amazed. Can it be true? Like them, I know what happens in death. There is a finality that severs all communication and all community with the one who has died. Yet Mark's gospel meets us in our trembling and fear with the good news that not only was Jesus raised, but he goes ahead of us, creating community where we will meet him along the way on our journeys.

In other words, Jesus promises to be with his disciples creating community with them. The resurrection is not just a future hope, it is a present reality. Christ lives, always going ahead of us, so that we might live with hope and strength in each chapter of our lives. Jesus had tried to tell his disciples this in John's gospel when he said, "*I go to prepare a place for you, and I will come again and will take you to myself so that where I am, there you may be also*" (John 14:2-3).

The resurrection is both a future hope and a present reality. Yet we struggle to express our hope in the resurrection because we are still living into it. It is only in looking back with faith upon our lives that we see the Jesus who has always been going ahead of us, preparing a place for us. Like us, the women at the tomb had to hear and believe this good news. This is what I find so compelling about Mark's gospel: They had to trust that he was going ahead of them.

My life is not especially unique. I have had some experiences that others have not had, just as many here today have had experiences that I have not had. But as I reflect upon my own human journey, I realize that at significant moments in each stage of my life, whether it was moving to a new house or a new school as child, going off to college as young person, being sent to another country as a missionary, or in accepting the call to this congregation, over and over, I found myself alone in places where I knew no one. And yet, in each of these places, I realized that Jesus had already been ahead of me preparing a place and opportunities, preparing new friends and community that I could not have made solely on my own.

The words, "*he is going ahead of you...there you will see him*" are the good news of Easter. He goes ahead of each of us, his Holy Spirit always leading each heart that is open to him. He

has even brought us together today in this place as his body, the church. You see, his church is not simply a building, the church is Christ's living, breathing and resurrected body in this world.

The stained-glass windows around the high altar are visual representation of this community, they represent the communion of saints. Christ's church is not simply a building, it is a living community of eternal life for all who call upon his name – Christ is at the center surrounded by the saints, we who are alive and those who have completed their journey and rest in him.

He goes ahead of you, and you will see him in the community he creates in you. You see him today in the faces of those around you. You have seen and heard him in the voices of many others along the way who have shared his words of forgiveness and hope with you.

His words "*go and tell*" are what we do as Easter people. Jesus needs and includes each of us in his ongoing gospel story. Go and tell others what he has done for you. Go and tell others he is alive so others might also be freed from the fear of death and the living tombs they have walled themselves into. Go and tell others because this world is in great need of hope. This world needs a hope that overcomes division, war, and death. This world needs a living Savior who creates new community where people are divided, alone, and afraid.

He is going ahead of you. Use your days to tell others so that more and more, amid the world's brokenness, he might unite all people in new community and new life in him.

He is risen. He is always going ahead of you.

Follow him. He is leading you into eternal life. Amen.