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Resurrection of Our Lord - Year B

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Isaiah 25:6-9

Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24

I Corinthians 15:1-11

Mark 16:1-8

4/01/2018

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. Mark:

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.

The Gospel of our Lord.

Prayer

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Terror and Amazement!

Christ has risen! The tomb is empty! Or, to put it in the words of a friend of mine, April Fools! See you in Galilee! As I said in the children's sermon, this is THE story of our faith. Without the resurrection, we are nothing. In it we find the culmination of all of God's work, thousands of years of covenant renewal and forgiveness. In today's Gospel we see the defeat of death, and I'm not just talking about the pseudo-springtime celebration we tend to associate with Easter. While winter is over, the plants were never dead. This is something totally different! But first, before we talk anymore about this tomb, we need to talk about how we got there.

We know how the story ends, so we often forget to place ourselves in the text, to let ourselves really feel the emotions and power of what happens. The movement was over. The followers of Jesus had heard him talk about a resurrection, but in the Jewish context of that time, resurrection was something that would happen to all people, at once, later in time. They thought he would be the Messiah, ushering in a new age. His entrance into Jerusalem was welcomed with a parade! The things that he did were unlike anything they had ever seen before! When he spoke, the words cut into your very soul, resonating somewhere so deep that you found yourself giving up everything to follow him.

But now... he was gone. Three days ago it had all come crashing down. As they nailed him to the cross, you went into shock. This just couldn't happen! It wasn't part of the plan! He

was the one to save the whole world! He died in agony, and after it was over you watched as the disciples disappeared. Some friends took the body and laid it in the tomb before they too went into hiding. Everyone was on edge. Were they next?

This was the mood in Jerusalem in the morning where our Gospel lesson today picks up. The women, in their grief, fall into a pattern of simply going through the motions. They set off towards the tomb to take care of business. Like the story of all churches, the hard work is taken care of by the women of the congregation, who make sure that all the details are taken care of. The two Marys and Salome don't even stop to think about the stone in front of the tomb when they set off. When they see the stone rolled away, they still don't think that he has been raised. The only logical answer is that someone has desecrated the body. The blows just keep coming, they think.

As they approach the tomb they see a man dressed in white. The text doesn't tell us that this is an angel, but it seems to be the logical assumption. The women react in the exact same ways that one normally does when meeting an angel, and the story plays out like every angel encounter in the Gospels: angel appears, person(s) are terrified or "alarmed," and angel tells them not to be afraid. Standard angelophany stuff, which is the fancy word for when an angel appears.

Here is where the story gets interesting, and it's another reason why I love the Gospel of Mark. The women just run away in terror. If you open your bibles and look at the ending of the Gospel of Mark you'll notice that this is it. One scholar begins his commentary on this section of the Gospels with "*When is an ending not an ending? When a dead man rises from the tomb —*

and when a gospel ends in the middle of a sentence.”¹ The Greek ends with the word “*gar*” which means “for.” It’s a word you just don’t end a sentence with, let alone a gospel.

Which is apparently what someone else thought too. When you’re re-reading the gospel lesson tonight you’ll notice that the Gospel of Mark has another ending, often called “the longer ending of Mark.” Somebody wasn’t happy with the abrupt ending of the Gospel of Mark and decided to give it a little something extra. 99.9% of all scholars agree that this was a later addition because we can’t find it in the earliest manuscripts. What scholars argue about is what in the world the original writer was thinking. The three theories are this: maybe the writer died before finishing the Gospel. This most people don’t think is likely. Second, maybe we’re missing a fragment of the original Gospel. While this is more likely than the first, it’s still not widely considered. The third and final theory is that the writer intentionally ended the Gospel this way.

That’s great, but what does that have to do with us? I’m glad you asked! I think the story ends without an ending because the original writer knew that the story goes on! Dr. Williamson writes that Jesus “*goes before us; always he beckons forward to a new appearance in the Galilee of the nations, in the Galilee of our daily lives. We never know where and when we shall see him...*”² Yes, the women run away in terror, but eventually they broke their silence, somehow the story got out, or we wouldn’t all be sitting here.

Somehow those disciples and followers of Jesus got their act together and within a few hundred years were knocking on the door of the emperor. The story spread, and continues to spread, to all the corners of the earth! Jesus beckons us forward, drawing us to a richer and more

¹Williamson, Lamar. *Mark*. Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009. pp. 283

²Williamson, Lamar. *Mark*. Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009. pp. 286

faithful understanding of what it means to be a human being. We share the story in our lives with more than just words. The story teaches us reconciliation, the need for forgiveness, and the call to offer that forgiveness. The story shapes our community in love, giving us a framework for understanding how we are called to live now that we live in the “now but not yet.” And most importantly, it shows us the the real power of a God who refuses to let death have the last word. That’s the message of our faith, that’s the story we share. Christ has risen. He has risen indeed. Alleluia, amen.