

People of the Resurrection Reading: Mark 16:1-8 Easter Sunday/B 3/31/24
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Alleluia, Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed, alleluia! What an incredible story we have just heard. The story of Jesus does not end on the cross nor in the burial tomb. God has done something new, something unheard of to this point. The crucified one is not resuscitated to do more of the same, but rather risen to a new life. The powers of the world which corrupt and destroy the creatures of God just couldn't keep him dead.

Some folks describe the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus as the "greatest story ever told." Others continue to be baffled by its mystery. Whatever side of the coin you might fall on, what we do know is this: The Divine Word entered human history through a helpless, brown, middle eastern, Jewish baby, born of a yet-to-be-married couple. Slipping unobtrusively into a small province of the Roman Empire, the spirit of God descended upon this child who would grow up to be a healer, the anointed one, a prophet who identified with the powerless, the oppressed, the poor, and the homeless. He challenged the destructive powers of the world that included oppression by the Roman Empire, misogyny by the patriarchy, the corruption and hypocrisy of religious officials, the degradation of the poor by the rich, the violence against the weak by the powerful, and a series of laws that dictated legalism over compassion.

And because Jesus called out, stood against, and named these corrupt powers, they all conspired to kill him. Eventually, they were successful, at least they thought they were. But these powerful forces were unable to silence his words, quench his spirit, or destroy his followers. Instead, on the third day, the risen Christ broke the chains of death, and the reign of God continued despite the odds. Today, there are over 2 billion Christians world-wide, many of whom follow in his steps and spread his message of compassion. We are gathered here today because of this miracle. We have come to be reminded that with God, all things are possible. This is what gives us hope in the face of so much pain and suffering in our world today.

Each year on Easter Day, we re-tell the story of the resurrection. Each of the gospels offers us a different perspective and concludes with a different ending. This year, we read the resurrection story from the gospel of Mark. The story begins early in the morning as Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome make their way to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body which had been hastily buried after the crucifixion. Once there, they notice that the stone has been rolled away. Instead of his dead body, they see a young man dressed in a white robe who tells them: "*Do not be alarmed... He has been raised. He is not here. Go tell the disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.*"

(Mark 16)

But instead of running back to the disciples with the good news, the women hightail it out of there and they say nothing to anyone. The earliest manuscript of Mark's gospel ends as follows: "*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.*" (Mark 16)

These women sound like Episcopalians, saying nothing to anyone about their experience of God! Anyway, it can be a little uncomfortable to hear the story end this way, perhaps even a little embarrassing. Most readers find this ending an unsettling conclusion to the story and will say: "No, this is not the way it should end!" If you are one of those, how will you finish the story? How will you proclaim the resurrection in 21st century San Luis Obispo County? How will you shine a light into the darkness?

It was not easy to ‘believe in the resurrection’ in the first century; it is not any easier in the twenty-first. As we look around the world today, we see so much pain, suffering, and death and wonder when it will all end. And yet we know that out of the ashes of destruction, new life can and does occur. We recall that after Jesus’ crucifixion, some of the disciples and many of his followers, including family and friends, thought it would all end there – with a dead Jesus. So when they went to the tomb early in the morning, that is precisely what they were expecting. It is no wonder the women fled from the tomb with terror and amazement. Their minds were programmed to expect bad news. When times get tough, we often wait for the other shoe to drop, missing out on moments of grace that could have increased our joy.

Resurrection is about living into a new way of being that promotes life, liberty, and the dignity of every human being. So how you live your life, how you vote, how you share your resources, matter a lot. Resurrection is about letting go of the deadening grip of this world’s burnt-out systems of materialism and power and choosing instead to seek after those things that give life to the whole world, not just your own. Resurrection is about moving from cynicism and fear to a place of hope by focusing on what is true, honorable, and just. God longs for us to incorporate the Easter story as our own, rather than limit the resurrection to an event that happened some 2000 years ago. So how exactly do we do that?

For some of us, it is hard to figure out a theology of resurrection in our current day lives. But come to think of it, isn’t each new day a mini-resurrection...the gift of a new day of our life? If so, what is Easter calling us to do with our one precious life? At the fitness center I belong to, people have a saying: “The goal is to die young, as late as possible.” Maybe our resurrection saying should be: “The goal is to do as much good as possible in each daily resurrection until death leads to the final resurrection.”

Practicing resurrection can be as simple as waking up each morning, grateful for the day ahead, instead of focusing on our painful joints. Maybe it includes looking for and articulating the good news that comes our way instead of focusing on the depressing news that the media heaps upon us. Practicing resurrection includes supporting good policies that help the poor and the oppressed. For me it includes sending money to those non-governmental agencies who are on the ground in the Ukraine and the Gaza Strip and around the world...those organizations who can actually do something concrete to save lives, to feed the hungry, and to minister to the suffering. And last but not least, people of the resurrection need to embrace prayer and refuse to be discouraged by the powers of the world that corrupt and destroy the creatures of God.

Intercessory prayer is a spiritual defiance of the way things are. Intercessory prayer visualizes an alternative future to the current chaos in the world. “History belongs to intercessors who believe a different future into being. This future belongs to those who can envision a new and desirable possibility.”^(Walter Wink) This is the politics of hope. Hope is the conviction that the future holds new possibilities that are not evident in the present. In summary, the future is never closed because with God, all things become possible.

Believing in the resurrection is not easy in the 21st century just as it was not easy in the 1st century. Sometimes, we must “act as if,” knowing that out of the ashes of destruction new life can and does occur. May God grant us the courage to know and understand what things we ought to do and give us the grace and power to faithfully accomplish them; through Jesus Christ our Lord who was and is and is to come. Alleluia the Lord has risen indeed. Alleluia,