

RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD

April 1, 2018

Text: Mark 16:1-8

Theme: Easter People

Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed! Amen! Alleluia!

It is my annual quest to discover new and creative ways to celebrate the Resurrection of our Lord. On this Easter morning I know the sound of drums and bagpipes will fill the air in Jerusalem as people gather at the Garden Tomb. I know in Florence an ornate cart will be led through the streets of the city and during the Easter mass the Archbishop will light a fuse that leads straight to the cart and the cart will come alive with an impressive fireworks display. And in Brazil I know festivities will take place throughout the country that includes Samba dance troupes – all events that point to Jesus Christ.

I love the sound of drums and bagpipes and an impressive fireworks display and people demonstrating their joy through dancing but maybe we can save that for next year. In the meanwhile we enjoy our beautifully decorated sanctuary and we join the voices of our choir – complemented by brass instruments – so that we can fill our space with glorious anthems and hymns of praise in thanksgiving for what God has done for us. We can put together as many bells and whistles as we want but Easter Sunday is about the message that is being proclaimed today throughout the whole world: the same Jesus who died on the cross has been raised from the dead.

This is the foundation of our faith.

Christ is alive! He is risen! He is risen indeed! Amen! Alleluia!

But on this Easter Sunday my message to all of you faithful followers of Christ is different because the world we live in is different. In my studies I came across a phrase that really resonated with me. It stated that we are living in a Good Friday world. And if we were to recount all that has taken place since last Easter Sunday, it would be difficult to dispute. We have seen our share of suffering and violence where too many innocent people have been caught in the line of fire. We have seen more marches for more causes as we seek answers to complex questions in the midst of our anger and grief.

Mistakes have been made and people have been hurt. We live in a Good Friday world but I also believe there is a cure (a solution). The antidote is to be Easter people (not just today) but every day moving forward.

Something unique and very profound takes place every Easter Sunday that should not be forgotten as soon as we step outside these doors. Not only is this the day for us to remember the God of the resurrection. It is the day that we are given a new identity and a new voice. And with this new identity and new voice, we are commanded to turn around and face the Good Friday world and proclaim with deep conviction that Jesus Christ has conquered death and the grave once and for all. God just offered us new options and a new life. And it becomes our responsibility to not only share that news with others but to live as if we believe it.

Easter people understand that when we encounter the world, then we encounter Christ. From Matthew 25:

Come, you that are blessed by my Father for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was in prison and you visited me.

Easter people understand that as we have been forgiven then we will do everything in our power to forgive others even if we believe they do not deserve it. Easter people understand that whatever suffering we have experienced in our lives we are never alone for on this day we are brought into a fuller relationship with God. Today is proof that God can and will enter our places of despair and God can and will give us the strength to get ourselves up and running. If death does not have the last word then Easter people understand that we have to live our lives as if everything points to Christ. Today Christ is calling us by name and breathing new life into us so that we can go and enter this broken world with the truth of the gospel message.

As we read from the Gospel of Mark this morning, the author gives us another phrase to contemplate: Easter is God's comment on Good Friday. The resurrection of our Lord is not just another miracle story like the raising of Lazarus. On Good Friday our ears were ringing as Jesus cried from the cross.

Now three day later we listen to a young man (dressed in a white robe) who tries to settle the hearts of the women who came to anoint the body of Jesus. They were startled and alarmed to see him. But he quickly told them that the one they were looking for (Jesus of Nazareth) (the one who was crucified) has been raised. He is no longer in the tomb. Look for yourselves. But do not delay! Go and tell his disciples and Peter that they will see him in Galilee.

So they left and fled the tomb.

Fear and amazement took over them.

And because of their fear they said nothing to anyone.

Unlike the other gospel accounts, this is where the Gospel of Mark ends. The disciples are not heard from again. The response of these three women brings us face-to-face with the mystery of faith because in this gospel reading there are no heroes among the followers of Jesus Christ. The hostility that put Jesus on the cross made them flee in fearful silence. I believe that is what happens in a Good Friday world. They are not yet Easter people.

What we learn on this Easter is that it is the faithfulness of God that completes the story. Remember that God split open the heavens when Jesus was baptized and then God tore the curtain of the temple in two when his Son died. God can and will bring faith out of our weakness and fears. Jesus did not need to come once more and choose a new team in order to solicit better disciples. Despite where our gospel lesson ends today, Jesus did accomplish the will of God when he suffered on the cross and rose again. However imperfect our faith and however many times we remain silent when we could testify to the gospel, we can always return to the Lord and he will receive us. The promise of Easter is that none of us can go so far away from Christ that we cannot be touched by his healing presence.

God is present in the loud hallelujahs and glorious proclamations of a grand Easter morning. God will also persist in a Good Friday world. He will redeem that which is broken by violence. The tomb does not hold him and grace abounds. Easter people know that message and we must do what we can to be part of the solution (not just today) but every day moving forward. Easter people understand that we cannot keep silent any longer. From Ecclesiastes we read that there is a time to speak and a time to keep silent. Now is the time to speak.

Christ is alive! He is risen!

He is risen indeed! Amen! Alleluia!