

Mark 16:1-8
Easter Then and Now
WRCoB 4.12.20

The Gospel of Mark describes Easter in the briefest of ways.

Really, all the gospel accounts of that morning are scanty.

Much briefer than the Gospel records
Of the arrest, trials, and the crucifixion of Jesus.

Along with the brevity
When one compares the differing accounts
No rendition is the same.

But we are in the Gospel of Mark
And we will see it through his eyes this morning.

What we know from Mark is this:

Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome
Went early Sunday to where they buried Jesus.

When they arrived
They discovered the stone rolled away
And the tomb empty.

What we know from Mark
Is they met someone inside the tomb.

Mark doesn't announce it's an angel
Just that he was dressed in white.

He informs the women Jesus is alive
And that Jesus would meet them in Galilee.

The women flee in terror not saying anything to anyone.

That's more or less it, according to Mark.

The point being . . .

From Mark's perspective
The barest of details.

It was only later Mary Magdalene met the Risen Lord
And went and told the others about her experience.

Even then, Mark writes

**Mark 16:11 But when they heard he was alive and had
been seen by her, they would not believe it.**

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The four gospels

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John
All describe the scene differently.

So it's hard to retrieve the actual facts
Of what really happened on that first Easter.

But facts aside, we can sense the mood.

Mark says the women trembling and bewildered
Left the scene at the tomb
Saying nothing to anyone
Because they were afraid.

Matthew's account has the guards surrounding the tomb
So afraid that they shook and became like dead men.

Luke has the disciples so disbelieving
That they told the women who came from the tomb
That they what they said was nonsense.

John, the most descriptive of the accounts
Describe the disciples locked in their room
In fear for their lives.

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Fear, sorrow, isolation, confusion
An almost surreal feel to everything
Uncertain what the immediate future holds.

In many ways, the very first Easter Sunday
Is not dissimilar to what we are experiencing
On this Easter Sunday.

The headlines of any newspaper
Whether here or abroad
Any TV news item anywhere in the world
All relate to one universal topic
The Corona Virus.

In just a matter of weeks
Everything as we know it
Has been turned upside down
And inside out.

From charging forward aggressively and confidently
Invincibly and irrepressibly

We are left reeling with a new reality.

We now understand how fragile it all is
The economy
The nation's healthcare system
National supply chains
Job security
Our retirement

And ultimately, life itself.

Matthew Woodley, editor of Preaching Today
Tells of the director of a hospital in Spain

*Traumatized by the images of the emergency care unit
where he works, confessed that “we have sinned from too
much confidence.”*

The author of Hebrews describes an underlying feeling
We might be experiencing.
And wishing we weren't.

**Hebrews 2:15 NIV . . . [we] who [are] held in slavery by
[our] fear of death.**

We are living in fear, sorrow, isolation and confusion
On this Easter unlike any Easter
We've ever experienced before.

Despite all the various online streaming
Pastors, teachers and musicians
Are doing to maintain connectedness
During Holy Week

We've experienced little to decrease these feelings.

And this morning rather than enjoying
All the festivities we had planned
The Easter morning early service
Community breakfast
Children's Easter egg hunt
And the 11:00 service

Here we are, hunkered down in our own homes
In front of our own TV, computer, or phone screens
Seeking some meaningful way
To worship the resurrection of our Lord.

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I quote the words of Rev. Allison Lanza
(Associate Pastor at Ridglea Christian Church, Fort Worth)

“The very first Easter was not in a crowded worship space with singing and praising. On the very first Easter, the disciples were locked in their house...Alone in their homes, they dared to believe that hope was possible, that the long night was over and morning had broken.”

What the disciples and followers of Christ
Needed to hear that morning
Is the same thing we need to hear this morning

The message of hope found in the resurrection of Jesus.

The Apostle Paul says it best.

1 Corinthians 15:3-8 (NLT)

³ I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me. Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. ⁴ He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said. ⁵ He was seen by Peter and then by the Twelve. ⁶ After that, he was seen by more than 500 of his followers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. ⁷ Then he was seen by James and later by all the apostles. ⁸ Last of all, as though I had been born at the wrong time, I also saw him.

In the same chapter, Paul cuts to the core
Of the fear of death and mortality.

1 Corinthians 15:55-57 (NRSV)

**⁵⁵ “Where, O death, is your victory?
Where, O death, is your sting?”**

⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

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If there ever was an Easter Sunday that we need to hear
The message of salvation
It is this Easter Sunday.

The late John Stott calls it
The up to the minute relevance of Jesus' resurrection.

The Resurrection somehow resonates with our human condition. It speaks to our needs as I reckon no other event of antiquity does, or even could.

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I have preached an Easter sermon
Every year for almost 25 years.

The challenge has always been
To try to find new, insightful, and exciting twists
To the resurrection story.

But this year, I take Woodley's advice.

I don't need to try and make the resurrection relevant
Because it already is!

I just need to proclaim it.

It is the power of Jesus to usher broken, fragile humanity into his "newness of life" (Rom. 6:3).

Frederick Buechner writes

He rose. A few saw him briefly and talked to him. If it is true, there is nothing left to say. If it is not true, there is nothing left to say. For believers and unbelievers both, life has never

been the same again. For some, neither has death. What is left now is the emptiness. There are those who, like Magdalene, will never stop searching till they find his face.

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I wonder, if and when, this is over and done with
If it will ever be completely over and done with

I wonder if like the 911 tragedy
Places of worship will see an increase in attendance?

Will this crisis draw us closer to each other
And closer to our Savior?

Will we celebrate a future Easter
In the newly-rediscovered hope

Of the promises of eternal life
Through the death and resurrection of Christ?

The relevance of Easter is made more poignant
In light of the many thousands of people
Who have lost their lives in this pandemic.

Leslie Newbigin wrote, *resurrection is no longer a mere doctrine: it has a living face and a name. Jesus is himself the presence of the life which is God's gift beyond death. To be bound to Jesus by faith is to share already now the life which is beyond death.* (Leslie Newbigin, *The Light Has Come*, Eerdmans, p. 142)

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The mood of Easter Sunday, then as now
Is one of sorrow, fear, isolation and disbelief.

The Easter message fits our needs quite nicely.

For we, like the early risers of that first Easter morning
Rise, filled with dread at the prospects of the day
Only to be stunned into the awakening beauty
Found in the cry of hope and promise

I have seen the Lord!

May we, like Magdalene,
Experience the life-giving presence of Jesus
In the midst of our strife and turmoil

May we wait patiently
For the time we can come together
When safe to do so

To celebrate the unity we have in our common humanity
And our common and collected faith
In a Savior born to save the world
Who rose victor over even death.

May we celebrate the good news of Jesus
That proclaims that life follows death
As spring follows winter

New life born out of death and decay.

That love ends up winning out.

The Lord is risen!
The Lord is risen indeed!