

# Easter Sunday

April 4, 2021

Sermon by Rev. Zachary W. Johnson

Hill Avenue Grace Lutheran Church  
Pasadena, California

## Gospel: Mark 16:1-8

<sup>1</sup>When 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]. <sup>2</sup>And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. <sup>3</sup>They had been saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" <sup>4</sup>When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. <sup>5</sup>As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. <sup>6</sup>But 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. <sup>7</sup>But 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." <sup>8</sup>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.

## SERMON by Pastor Zachary Johnson

"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." That can't be how the story ends! What was Mark thinking?! I mean, it's Easter Sunday! This is the holy day of the church year where everything is supposed to be positive, upbeat, and joyous. After all, the church sanctuary is beautifully decorated; we are singing exuberant hymns that fill our hearts with good vibes. Plus, today is also filled with good and fun things like Easter baskets for the kids and most likely a delicious Easter feast awaiting us following our worship service.

Yes, today is such a joyous day; a day where we celebrate Christ's victory over death! So why is the ending to Mark's gospel such a buzz kill?! It is no wonder there are two added addendums to the ending of the gospel. Somebody else wasn't happy with the way Mark's gospel originally ended. Why would Mark end the gospel with some of Jesus' most faithful disciples - the



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women who had the courage to follow Jesus to the cross while the other disciples fled and hid in fear for their lives - why would Mark end his gospel with having the women flee from the tomb without sharing the amazing news that Jesus is risen?

Well, I believe that Mark ends his gospel in such an ironic way to try and convey two things to the reader. The first is the reality that the good news of Jesus Christ is more powerful than human fear. Obviously, we are all gathered here today because we know of the good news of Jesus' resurrection. For over 2,000 years this story has been told and shared to a multitude of different people in different countries across the world! Even though the women fled in fear, the word of God got out.

Also, because the good news of Jesus Christ is more powerful than human fear, herein lies an invitation from Mark to us, the hearers of the gospel. The good news of Jesus Christ needs to be shared, for many in our world have not yet heard this amazing story. There are also others who have forgotten the story and who are desperate for a reminder. Mark ends his gospel in this way to challenge the reader/hearer, nay I say dare the reader/hearer to finish the story by sharing the good news with others.

This is why God established the Church. The Christian church has been tasked with sharing in the mission of God's work of redemption and reconciliation. We are the vessels that Christ Jesus chooses to use in order to show the broken world that God's love for us is stronger and more powerful than death! The good news of the Easter story is that we no longer need to fear death!

In baptism we were all tied into Christ's death and resurrection. Each and every day we are washed clean of sin so that we can arise with the new life we've been given in Christ Jesus. In other words, we have been freed from our brokenness so that we can live a life that is grounded in the love of God, a love that reminds us that the only true identity we possess is beloved child of God. That means no matter how the broken world may try and define who we are, the truth will always be that our true identity is beloved child of God. Since God has claimed us as such through the marking of the cross on our foreheads at baptism, death has no claim over us anymore. We die to sin and rise anew in Christ Jesus!

Since we no longer need to fear death, we are now free to share the good news of Christ's resurrection with all whom we meet out in the world. We are free to share the good news by



telling the story, serving the other out of love, teaching our children, being generous with our resources, advocating justice for the oppressed, caring for the poor, and praying for peace. Jesus will go ahead of us and lead the way!

Speaking of which, I believe the second message Mark is trying to convey to us with his ending is to point out that Jesus isn't here. Jesus has flown the coop; he isn't found in the empty tomb. He has gone ahead to Galilee, waiting for us there. In other words, if we want to see Jesus we need to go out into the regular, everyday world.

This isn't to say that Jesus isn't present during our Sunday worship. Don't worry, Jesus shows up here in word and sacrament. But Jesus doesn't just stay here until the next Sunday. Jesus goes out ahead of us into the world in order to guide us to where the good news needs to be proclaimed most to those places that are empty of Easter joy because the brokenness of the world has beat them down.

Our gospel this morning is a good reminder to us that our Easter joy doesn't end later on today after the feast has been consumed, the Easter eggs all found, and the heads of those chocolate bunnies has been eaten. Easter joy is something that continues to be present each and every day, for we are living in the age of the resurrection. We are living in the royal reign of Christ and death cannot touch us here!

Now is our chance to pray, listen, and follow Jesus out into the world, so that we can be the proclaimers of the good news that Christ is risen! Easter joy is more powerful than human fear. Easter joy is what continues the story beyond today. Easter joy is what brings the world hope.

Amen.



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