

Sunrise 4-20-14

Mk 16:1-7 bonfire, candles, song

Hear this word from God, a story so beautiful it's hard to take it all in.

*When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. 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.**

Easter, like our lives, begins in the dark. We started outside this morning in the cold and bleak. In our lives when we blink our eyes open for the very first time, they've seen nothing but dark for months in the womb and then suddenly light unbearable. For forty days in Lent we've repented, given up something, *not* said hallelujah. Go ahead and say it just for fun: hallelujah. And now we have light, our greatest hymns, our holiest day, our most festive celebration. Christians have forever greeted one another in a special way today, one will say "Christ is risen." The other will say "He is risen indeed." Let's greet each other that way today and often the next 50 days until Pentecost.

The women coming to the tomb that first Easter didn't know it was Easter. Their work belonged in the dark. They were friends of Jesus and he was gone. They were doing the least they could do—give his body the dignity and tender affection it did not receive the last few days. Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of James, and Salome bring spices to go and anoint him. A friend of mine remembers hearing in her Baptist church growing up about the ones she called "all the Marys." She couldn't remember all these names, Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of James, Salome, let's just call them all the Marys. They tenderly care for the body of Christ. The church has never been without women who tenderly care for the body of Jesus and dress our wounds. But on that first Easter all the Marys didn't even know it was Easter. It was just the first day after Passover, the first day they could have contact with a dead body, the first day they could tend the wounds of their dead friend, and make them smell better, fragrant.

I wonder who has tenderly cared for you and your wounds. Give thanks for those people: nurses, caregivers, friends, all the people who triage for others. Life has no decency without such angels of mercy. It may be a good time to tell those folks in your life thanks, send them a note (handwritten—not just email!). Or even better, let's try to *be* like the Marys for others, dress *their* wounds, make them fragrant.

On their way, the Marys forget there's a giant rock rolled in front of Jesus' tomb. This stone would be big enough to prevent grave robbers and animals and thieves from getting in there. Of

course no one put the stone there to keep the one *in* the grave from getting *out*. This is more than a little ridiculous—like people in our day heading to the graveyard to care for a dead friend without stopping to think, wait, they're buried six feet under there and we don't have a shovel. But in the old order, in the dark, people get confused. The only possibilities in the old order are grave robbery, or wild animals, or political enemies coming and taking the body, competing with the Marys' fierce loyalty. Tombs never open from the inside, in the dark.

This leaves me wondering what tombs we face. Most people fear death. I do. This is not entirely rational. Whatever happens at death "we" are not around for it. But then we really fear other things long before death: disability, pain, loneliness, failure, shame, being found out for the fraud we fear we are, job loss, dream disintegration, being a burden on others. Those things are all real in the dark, in the old order. We would have no mission as a church if lives didn't fall apart. We can hear the tomb rolling shut and see the darkness so thick you can grab it. Just think of those you know who are in darkness now: cancer, alcoholism, depression, unjust accusations. They're just part of life. In the old order. Where tombs stay shut.

But Mark starts to hint something new is coming. "Very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had just risen." The sun in the sky gives us life and marks our days. The sun's rising is also a sign of the sun of righteousness, Jesus. Dark is always followed by light. Of course in the old order light is also always followed by dark. Everyone who *survives* cancer, job loss, dream loss, alcoholism, all of us still lose out to death in the end. My boys have been watching *Star Wars* recently—they love Yoda's line to Luke, "When 900 years old you become, look this good, you will not." They think it's funny—they're starting to realize they won't live to 900 years old. In fact one day, if things go *right*, they'll bury me. If things go wrong I'll bury one or more of them. That's just the way it is in our unfair cursed world. About the best you can do in the old order is bind one another's wounds, make dead bodies smell better, and try to move on. That's the old order of sin, death, and darkness.

Then something happens the women cannot have predicted. A stone rolled back. No *body* inside, just a young man, dressed in white, sitting there. Here things get a little sketchy. Matthew says they *saw* an angel roll the stone away and sit on it with thunder and lightning. John says there are two angels, one sitting where Jesus' head had been, one where his feet had been. Both Matthew and John are more dramatic. Mark doesn't even say it's an angel, just that it's a man. In this new order the light is so bright we can't see clearly, we blink and get confused, wait, is that one man or two, an angel or not, did we see the stone rolled or only see it *after* it had been rolled away, what'd he say again? Mark is the most subtle telling of the story. And the young man's words are so beautiful I'm tempted to leave them in the original Greek: "Anesthe. Ouk estin hode." He is not here. They are ready for that part. They see the body *isn't there*. They have explanations for that: grave robbers, animals, political enemies, even the stone being rolled could be explained somehow. The next words . . . *cannot* be explained. "He is raised." Now this, they have no categories for. Raised? Like, come back from the dead? This is altogether new. Not in the list of possibilities in the old order. Some kind of new order must have broken out in the midst of the old that has new rules, new possibilities, new hopes. Can they, or we, *imagine*? Jesus isn't just raised. He *cannot* die again. But he's not a ghost. He can eat and fish and be with his friends in his new indestructible body. Think

what's different if the dead don't stay dead. Tyrants lose their power if death is not to be feared. If bodies rise, relationships are restored, death's hold is slipping, the world God loves can be as beautiful as God intended, starting today, with this one tomb, working its way out into every particle of creation that's ever existed. Can you see why the Marys got confused?

The man in white says something remarkable. "Go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you into Galilee, there you will see him." Tell his disciples *and* Peter. Wait, isn't Peter *one* of the disciples? It's as if the man knows Peter thinks not anymore. 'I betrayed the Lord. I'm like Judas. No hope for me.' The man in white says that is an *old* order way of thinking. A new order has broken out in which sins aren't recorded, or if they are recorded they're in disappearing ink. Jesus is back to restore relationship. He is raised in a cemetery because that's where the dead are (as the bank robber said he robs banks because that's where the money is). No tomb is safe now. Jesus sees the Marys *in a garden* because the resurrection is the Garden of Eden restored. It's the whole world made right. It's our gift to *help* God make it right now. It's our job to help God make this world the one God dreams about. You too Peter. Us included. No one is exempt, the whole world is different now, it's a world of resurrection where tombs don't stay shut and all creation sings praise.

Flannery O'Connor's novel *Wise Blood* has a traveling evangelist like the pit preacher at Carolina and State and App, like the guy on the street corner at the big light here in Boone—saw him yesterday, on Holy Saturday. Only the *Wise Blood* preacher has Christianity in reverse. His church is one he says "where the lame don't walk, the deaf don't hear, and what's dead stays that way." A perfect description of not-church, not-resurrection, the old order. The church without Christ, he calls it. "Where the lame don't walk, the deaf don't hear, and what's dead stays that way." Flannery O'Connor helps us see how weird *our* belief is. Wait, if the lame do walk, the deaf do hear, if what's dead *doesn't* stay that way, *isn't everything different?* It's not just that Jesus--one guy--is raised, it's that resurrection breaks out everywhere.

I wonder about for you, what sorrow is hanging heavy on your heart, or the hearts of the ones you love. If resurrection has already begun in Jesus, how might that light shine in the dark place we sit in?

Then I love this. Here's the last verse of Mark: "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 end. Full stop. The other gospels end more gloriously. Mark ends so abruptly the church has often added endings to it, that can't be it, it's like the end of Monty Python's *The Holy Grail*—my wife Jaylynn took that video back to the movie store once, hey, the tape's messed up. They said no, it ends that way. Mark ends with the Greek word *gar*, a preposition like our word "for." It always assumes another word. But there is none here. That's it. No other piece of literature in ancient Greek ends with the word *gar*. Here's why I think the Gospel of Mark ends mid-sentence. The resurrection trips over into our lives. What will *we* do? *We* have to complete the sentence. "For . . .". What happens next? I don't know, no one does, that remains to be seen, in your life.

We know what happens next in the women's lives. They're terrified. We humans tend to sin right out the gate. Adam and Eve are in the garden about 20 minutes before they break God's laws. The Israelites are in the wilderness free from Egypt about 10 seconds before they complain and

wish they could go back. Jesus at his last supper tells his disciples to try to be the least, and they start an argument about who's the greatest. Jesus gives them his bread and wine, his body and blood, and one goes out and betrays, the other denies, the rest flee. The Marys do the same here too, they stay quiet, they don't go to Galilee, they seize up in terror. That's what we weak humans do. God's race begins with a gunshot, bang, and we trip off the block.

It's ok. The angel says tell the disciples *and Peter*--and the worst of us and all of us--he is raised. And there's nothing we can do to change that or put Jesus back in the tomb. The sun is up. The new order has dawned. We can see. God's world of resurrection has broken out in this old order of sin and death. All our sins can do now is bring more grace. All our tombs can do is make Christ's resurrection more glorious. All our world of fear and hate can do is show God's mercy in all its splendor. Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Go and live lives that *show* that resurrection. And never forget the one who knows your sins, knows you by name, and calls you *still*. Amen.