

## EASTER SUNDAY, MARCH 31, 2024

It's a 1600 year old tradition to tell a joke on Easter which is called *Risus paschalis* so here goes. There was a lawyer, doctor and a priest that were talking about what they would want others to say about them when they die and are looking at them in their casket. The lawyer said he hoped people would say, "I was a wonderful husband, upheld law, pursued justice and was a good father." The doctor said, "I hope people would say I was a wonderful healer and I cared for my patients and made a difference in people's lives". They then turned to the priest expecting she would say something humble and wise. After a long pause the priest looked at them with a big grin and said, "Well to be perfectly honest when I die and everyone is standing around looking at me, I like to hear one of them say, look she's moving". It's Easter and guess what, Jesus is not only moving he's on the move. But let's back up a moment and take a look at this familiar story.

Some of you know, I love to read mystery novels especially ones that always have a surprise ending. There are some endings that I wish I could write myself or continue it. But I've also read some novels where the ending has left me hanging and speechless wondering, "what now?" Lots of tv and streaming shows do that at the end of a season leaving you with a cliffhanger hoping that you will tune in for the next season to find out what has happened.

The Easter story in Mark's gospel does just that. It leaves us with a cliffhanger asking, "now what?" The gospel tells us that when the women arrived, they found a startling thing. The stone was rolled away! The body was gone and a young man was in the tomb. The Bible says (with some understatement) that the women were alarmed. Of course they were alarmed! They were terrified.

The young man said, "He has been raised, he is not here. Tell Peter and the disciples that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; he will see you there, just as he told you."

This was incredible news! Jesus was alive! He had risen from the dead! What do you suppose the women did? Were they jumping for joy? Dancing in the street? Singing alleluia? Running to tell others? Nope, not in Mark's gospel they didn't, at least, not right at first, anyway. Rather we're told "Terror and amazement seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid."

Perhaps the strangest thing about all of this is that this is the end of the gospel of Mark. That's the end of the book. That's the end of the story. You have to admit that this is a rather unsatisfactory ending. Of course, we know how the story ends. From the other gospels, we have Mary and the women running to tell the others, we have post-resurrection appearances of Jesus. There are seaside meals, assurance to those who doubt, garden embraces of the Risen Lord, and excited shouts of "He is Risen!"

But not in Mark. Mark just leaves us with frightened women. While the other gospels report what happened in the days to come, Mark leaves us right there, right in the moment. Try to imagine yourself for a moment being right there at the empty tomb. Now think of how you felt when a loved one died. Remember how days become a blur. You can do nothing but cry. There is a pain deep down in your heart and you feel sadness beyond words. Now translate those feelings to the women that day and add

fear to those feelings as they recognize that as a follower of Jesus, a similar fate may await them.

What other things make the women so afraid? As awful and terrible as the events of Passover week had been, they understood them. They were familiar with crucifixion, they were familiar with death but not resurrection. They had no frame of reference for this. The resurrection left their ideas of making sense of life totally inadequate.

The women found an empty tomb and a message that Jesus had gone before them into Galilee. And it was beyond belief. They had seen Jesus on the cross. They had seen his lifeless body taken down from the cross. They had seen his body laid in the tomb and the stone rolled into the entrance. And what they found on that Sunday morning left them absolutely terrified. It challenged everything they had ever experienced. Jesus' death, they could deal with. It was awful, but they knew about death, it was a known quantity. They could work through it. But resurrection was another story. They had no frame of reference for it. Suddenly everything was changed. To find that what you believe to be true, what you know to be true about how life is, is not true, can be absolutely terrifying. Someone said, "If death is not the end, then all the cards in the deck may be wild." That is what left them amazed and also terrified.

Still, this seems an odd way of ending a gospel story about resurrection. But it is actually true to Mark. Again and again in the gospel of Mark, Jesus heals someone, and the instructions they receive is, "Now don't tell anybody about this." In Mark especially, Jesus wants people to discover who he is and to find the meaning of his presence and the nearness of God's kingdom for themselves. And so just as he has done all along, Mark leaves it up to us to decide for ourselves how the story ends.

That is kind of the way Easter is, except that Easter is not just a story about Jesus and some followers who lived 2000 years ago. It is a story that speaks to us personally. The young man told the women at the tomb, "Tell his disciples...that he is going ahead of you to Galilee." Who are his disciples? That would also be us - you and me. And where was Galilee? For Jesus, Galilee was home. Going to Galilee meant going back home, back to the ordinary, back to the everyday normal day to day real life. For us, it means the same and back to our normal day to day living.

You see, resurrection announces that what we do with our lives matters, every act of compassion matters, every work that celebrates the good and true matters, every fair and honest act of business and trade, every kind word matters because they all contribute to God's work of redeeming this Good Friday world. And because death does not have the final say, none of the good we do can ever be lost, or forgotten, or wasted – it all has its place because the tomb is empty, because of resurrection.

Our job then is to live in such a way that the miracle of Easter can be seen in our lives. Remember, when you forgive your enemy, when you feed the hungry, when you defend the weak – you proclaim the resurrection. When you work to repair broken relationships, when you sacrifice for the sake of others, when you take time to support a friend – you proclaim the resurrection. When you stand up for the truth, when you refuse to compromise your integrity, when you love the unlovable – you proclaim the resurrection. This is our job as Christians – to declare with our lips and live with our lives the hope of Easter in a world, where for so many, hope can be difficult to find.

The story of Easter continues as we experience the risen Christ in our everyday lives. We are not just celebrating what happened so long ago. The words to those women on Easter morning are addressed to us as well. If we don't go back to Galilee – that is, back to where we live, day-in and day-out – and look for Jesus, expecting resurrection, living resurrection, then all of this is just a hollow exercise.

That's why Easter really is an unfinished story. It's God's story and it is also our story. We are given the opportunity to add our own chapter and ending. Hear again the words of the young man in the empty tomb: "You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised, he is not here...He is going ahead of you...there you will see him." How will you finish the story? Will you take hold of the new life that Christ offers? Will you look for resurrection in your everyday life?

The joy of Easter is that Christ lives and Christ brings us new life on a daily basis. And the story of God's new life continues in our lives, right here, right now. The story isn't finished. How it continues is up to us. So let each of us with God's help continue to write this incredible, life giving, hope filled story.

Alleluia - The Lord is risen! The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia! Amen.