



April 1, 2018 - Easter Day

Given by Rev. Mattei

"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. 7 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." (Mark 16:6-7)

Our worship just as our spiritual journey begins by the waters of Baptism. In Baptism we drown our old self and put on the risen Christ. We leave behind a culture of evil and abuse and rise new persons into the mind of Christ. We are freed from slavery to fear, hatred and violence as an inescapable system of life to live in unity and communion with God the Father, through the work of the Spirit following the Way that is Jesus Christ.

A heartfelt greeting of Happy Easter of Resurrection to all of you today: to all of you who came South to see your father, your mother, grandfather, grandmother; to all of you, members and non-members, Lutherans and non-Lutherans wanting to worship the Living God today; to all of you who have come out of deep love for the Lord as well as those who have come with doubts but honestly awaiting for answers to questions or to prayers; to those of you seeking guidance and support to express a living faith that makes sense; to those wanting to give God or the Church a second chance and those begging for forgiveness and a blessing. A Happy Easter of Resurrection and new Life to all who struggle to make sense of life and even more so of the promises of God; to all who sit politely in the pews but carry a heavy heart and every fiber of their body screams "Fake! Untrue!" To those of you who question: Does God really exist? Did the Resurrection really happen? Can I really trust God? Do I really want to be part of the Church that often seems to do more harm than good? I say to you Happy Easter with the hope that may join all of us on this journey of discovery and spiritual growth, walking together, experiencing resurrection stories that free us from fear to new life.

If you feel hurt and betrayed by the Church, abandoned by God, oppressed by the demands of religion or confused by the behavior of some church goers, this greeting is for you: Happy Easter of Resurrection and New Life. God's Spirit can renew us in our pain, gift us with wisdom eyes to see God at work in and around us, and strengthen our resolution to hope the promise that God will wipe away every tear and there will be no pain, no sign of death and no need for mourning.¹ May you be blessed along with us as the Word of new life washes over us today.

¹ See Revelation 21:4

“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my rock and my Redeemer.” Amen.²

The story of the Resurrection of Jesus as told by the evangelist Mark (16:1-8) informs us that “when the sabbath was over...” the three women went to buy spices with the intention of going to the tomb and anoint the dead body of Jesus. Mark repeats himself maybe to make himself plainly clear that he was talking about a dead Jesus since he had just announced that “very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb.”

Distraught over what had happened to their Master, this prophet of God, healer and miracle worker, this righteous man who had walked in the presence of God all his life, they rise early, anxious to complete the burial ritual, interrupted by the upcoming of Sabbath. Jesus had been crucified that Friday afternoon and soon would be Sabbath, the Day of Rest when no work should be done, a day set apart for only the worship of the Lord God who created the world and all that there is in it and who freed the Israelites from Egyptian and Babylonian slavery and from all slavery to abusive evil. That early morning they rush to the tomb, asking “to one another ‘Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?’” as anxiety escalates into panic mode (why haven’t they asked that question before they left? They knew in advance that a rock was obstructing the entrance to the cave, as it was customary, to protect the tomb from robbers).

Mark seems to be shaping his gospel account on the fly, throwing in elements of the oral tradition with no particular care for a final, cleaned up version. Maybe he wants to stress that for the disciples (as for us) resurrection is not complete, it is work in progress, still happening, still not understood, still misunderstood, still to be lived out. (“If you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”)³ Eventually, a final redactor notices the incompleteness of the gospel’s ending and adds in verses 9 through 19 where we read of Jesus’ appearances, his ascension to the right hand of God and the beginning of the disciples’ work of evangelization.

But as the women approach the tomb they realize that the stone had already been removed: their dilemma had been solved. By whom? Mark does not elaborate. As they immerse themselves in this dark and cold place of death they see a young man wearing only a white linen robe. Mark does not call him an angel as Matthew does⁴. He simply calls him “a young man”. The word translated as young man (*neaniskos*) makes only one other appearance in Mark’s gospel. When Jesus is arrested a young man flees the scene naked.⁵ A young, terrorized man is a witness to Jesus’ arrest and the beginning of the end. Now, a calm and confident young man announces the end of fear (“Do not be alarmed...”) and the beginning of Jesus’ resurrected life back in the streets of Galilee where it all began.

² Psalm 19:14

³ Colossians 3:1-3

⁴ Matthew 28:5

⁵ Mark 14:51

It has been said that “the young man is like a baptismal candidate who enters the rite naked and afraid, but comes out of the waters rising with Jesus, robed in a fresh gown, to proclaim Jesus’ story of promise.”⁶ In the words of scholars, “the resurrection of Jesus constitutes the decisive event in a sequence of eschatological events that will issue in the fullness of God’s kingdom. Jesus, the risen one, anticipates the glorious state that awaits all who remain faithful to his teaching and example.”⁷

The women are commissioned to tell the other disciples that Jesus has been raised. But they are too frightened and flee without saying anything to anyone. The original, open ended conclusion of the gospel of Mark leaves us on a sad note: “they were afraid.” but the open-endedness of Mark’s account demands a decision on our part. In several places of Mark’s Gospel we have heard Jesus predict his suffering but also announce his resurrection:⁸ Do we trust his words? Are we ready to go back to the streets of our Galilee and see Jesus, experience his story of peace, justice and reconciliation anew? Will our life become the missing end to Mark’s gospel?

I am grateful for the open-endedness of the gospel because it more closely describes our incompleteness, a life that still needs to be lived, humanity in progress. Just as for Baptism, our rising in Christ is not a one-day event but something to be lived out, enjoyed together in community and made known to others every day. Even when those around us insist the stone is too large, too heavy, too complicated to be moved, even when we hear that racism is too ingrained, that fascism is making a comeback and that hate is pulling people and families apart, we trust the testimony of the non-violent, risen Christ whose love has the power to transform fearful people into people of the resurrection and clenched fists into serving hands.

May we welcome the words of the young man today: “Do not be alarmed... But go...” and tell others he is wherever there is suffering and hurt, struggle and abuse, exclusion and estrangement and he wants his disciples to see him there and write resurrection stories of reconciliation and inclusion. Let us join together on this sacred journey. Amen.

⁶ Philip Ruge-Jones, Associate Pastor, Grace Lutheran Church, Eau Claire, Wis.

⁷ John Donahue and Daniel Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 460

⁸ Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:32-33