

April 4, 2021 Easter Sunday

Mark 16:1-8

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(Reference or sources: Debie Thomas in *Journey with Jesus* and the piece entitled Slow Easter posted on 3.28.21.
Barbara Brown Taylor in her book *Always a Guest* and the sermon from Easter 2006 entitled Practicing Resurrection.
Ideas from David Lose.net and his blog posted on 3.30.15 for Sunday 4.5.15. Phrases from my own sermon from 4.5.15.
Phrases from my sermon from 4.12.20.)

Alleluia, Christ is Risen.... Christ is Risen, Indeed. Alleluia!

Easter blessings, Easter peace to you, dear ones, in the name of the Risen Christ. Amen.

What a year.

On this gorgeous Easter morning, I would rather be gathering for worship in person with you in Dinkytown,
singing the hymns, sharing the breakfast,
not spread across our screens.

I'd rather be preaching and witnessing all of your faces, not just a smattering
hearing someone dare call out Amen,
sensing the Holy Spirit stirring.

I'd rather notice the tears running down someone's checks,
and how desperately we all need to hear Jesus' promise, God's promise of resurrection new life...
...right now, right here, especially right now.

I'd rather all of that...and I know you would too.

We're still worshipping from a distance,
still honoring the science and pace of vaccinations,
still taking great care and still not together.

There is much for which we yearn, not the least to be together in worship.

For the love of one another, staying home, staying put, staying connected... is the best we can do.

(Pause)

John's version of the Easter story is the familiar one.

Today, though, it's Mark that we heard at the start of our service.

Compared with John, our Easter Gospel in Mark is spare, stark, honest.

No appearance of Jesus whatsoever—alive or dead, did you notice that?

No disciples racing to the tomb.

No confusion where Mary in her grief mistakes the risen Jesus for the gardener.

No chance for Jesus and the disciples to talk again about faith or doubt,
or to debrief all that has happened.

Those tidbits we'd find in John, but not in Mark.

Even the amazement in Mark's gospel is twinged first with terror.

In Mark, Mary and Mary and Salome are told by the angel to go and tell the others

But instead, in the very next line, the gospel ends (rather abruptly, I'd add).

It ends like this: **"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's it. That's how it ends: they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

As Barbara Brown Taylor writes,

With the death of Jesus “they had lost their best hope for a new kind of life on earth.”
With Jesus they could imagine a world that blessed the outcast,
that upturned the social order,
that pushed back on the Roman rule that held them down every way they turned.
With Jesus all that was possible... but when he was killed at the hands of the state, everything shifted.

So when the women come to anoint his body that morning,

they don’t come just to grieve their friend, their loved one,
but, really, to mourn their lost hope, their lost vision. (BBT’s idea)
Coming to the tomb to take care of Jesus’ body,
that was risky in itself, things were so politicized, so dangerous.
To hear the message that Jesus had gone on ahead to Galilee, that ultimately is good news,
but it is simply too much for the women to take in, let alone to pass along quickly.

Clearly, someone said something to somebody.

for we’re saying it still today.
But Mark ends raw and abrupt, “They said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.”

Mark’s more spare version of the Easter gospel seems right for this morning, or, really, this year.

A year when we as a global community we have lost 2.7 million people,
elders, parents, children, siblings, friends, colleagues.
A year when violence against black and brown bodies and souls has been particularly high and traumatic,
say their names.
A year when racial reckoning and uprising has demanded a confession, prompted learning, soul-work and
homework for each of us and the institutions we love perhaps too dearly.
A year when protesters and neighbors have kept vigil, when families have been stretched thin or torn, and
we don’t know how it will all end.

There’s a collective experience of trauma that we’re living with.

Like the women at the tomb, we might hear the angel’s words, but we’re numb to the staggering losses,
dulled by the isolation, weary and worn by it all.
It’s all so much to take in.
So when the angel says to go and tell, what do they do?
What might we do?
“They said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.”

Debie Thomas writes, “Maybe, what we need this Easter *is* Mark’s version of the story.

Maybe we need time — as the women in Mark’s account needed time —
to sit with the terror and the amazement ...
when God’s incomprehensible work of redemption collides in real time
with the broken bewilderment of our lives.
Maybe we don’t *need* to shout right away,” she says. “Maybe it’s okay to whisper.”

Last night as I looked around the faces gathered for Easter Vigil on Zoom,

and in recent days as I've talked with many of you, I've been hearing common themes.

The weariness and grief is wearing.

The anxiety is high.

A loss for one, a new diagnosis for another, a death, economic uncertainty,

a baby, a mental health crisis, a stressed relationship, so much.

Some will feel like shouting this morning, shout, God bless you, shout, Alleluia.

And some will need to whisper, or perhaps just to sit by the tomb and weep for all that has happened,
for the ways that our whole vision of the world has shifted, God bless you, then do that.

Last year as we began the stay at home order and our family of four got down to the business of educating
and working from home (oh my!), we planted an Amaryllis.

We could measure the staying home by the height of those fast growing flowers.

Soon they grew bright and beautiful and lanky, much to our delight.

This year we received another Amaryllis.

In the busyness I set it aside and just recently planted the bulb.

It has greened up well, but is growing slowly, very slowly.

I wonder quietly if those Amaryllis leaves are my reminder of this slower paced Easter that Mark describes.

An Easter twinged by trauma, an Easter where we might whisper first,
perhaps finally finding a voice, or maybe letting tears have the day.

Dearly beloved, the resurrection always begins in the dark, and it often begins in a whisper.

On that day nearly 2000 years ago, before the sun rose, resurrection was happening.

Mystery is like that, it begins in the dark;

It's not quite ready to get out the brass or explain the good news.

It doesn't wear an Easter dress, or demand a certain menu.

The resurrection mystery begins in quiet, in darkness,
often, very often, in bewildered fear and uncertainty.

No need to rush resurrection.

That's where God does her best work: in the quiet knitting, in the silent growth, in the steady healing.

It seems Mary and Mary and Salome knew this, for they came with "wounded awe", as Debie Thomas
says.

There is a gap, if you will, between God's work of mercy and love, and what we can take in, what we can
understand.

Here's the good news:

We can hold onto the resurrection

even without making sense of death, or that agonizing reality that a loved one can be wrenched away.

We can trust in Jesus, without grasping fully what Jesus' reign might look like.

We can believe that all shall be well, even while we know that it is not all well now.

Friends in Christ, what are you bringing with you to the tomb this morning?

What needs resurrection in your life?

Sometimes we live this new life bold and strong, clear in our witness, ready to shout.
Other seasons our fear and amazement need their time, their space.
However we are able to receive it, the new life of Christ's death and resurrection is ours to live.
May you know the steady power of Christ's resurrection love.
May love win and justice triumph.
May new life find you this season, right where you are.
Alleluia! Christ is Risen. Christ is risen indeed, Alleluia. Amen.