

**March 31, 2024 Easter Sunday**

**Isaiah 25:6-9, Acts 10:34-41, Mark 16:1-8**

**Rev. Jen Nagel, University Lutheran Church of Hope, Minneapolis**

[Ideas from Working Preacher for this date, Audrey West: <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/resurrection-of-our-lord-2/commentary-on-mark-161-8-9>; Diana Butler Bass quotes are from her The Cottage for 3/31/24 called They Were Afraid: [https://dianabutlerbass.substack.com/p/happy-easter?utm\\_source=substack&publication\\_id=47400&post\\_id=143052931&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_content=share&utm\\_campaign=email-share&triggerShare=true&isFreemail=true&r=1dkeho&triedRedirect=true](https://dianabutlerbass.substack.com/p/happy-easter?utm_source=substack&publication_id=47400&post_id=143052931&utm_medium=email&utm_content=share&utm_campaign=email-share&triggerShare=true&isFreemail=true&r=1dkeho&triedRedirect=true); Shared ideas with Rev. Jane McBride for this date, 3/31/24; More about Gaza Ceasefire Pilgrimages here: <https://www.gazaceasefirepilgrimage.com/>; John Dominic Crossan parts are from the webinar hosted by Tripp Fuller and Diana Butler in Conversation with John Dominic Crossan March 2024; Pdraig O Tuamo quote from the preface of his Daily Prayer book.]

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

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

**“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. You heard it.**

That’s the end of our Easter Gospel.

You got dressed up—looking pretty good this morning!

The flowers are stunning.

Maybe you enjoyed some Easter breakfast.

We’ve sung Jesus Christ is Risen Today.

There’s tuba and timpani, trumpets and trombones, congas.

**And did you hear it, the gospel from Mark, the Easter Gospel from Mark, ends like that?  
“And they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.”**

**Diana Butler Bass writes, “Being afraid is much more normal than shouting alleluia.**

Empty tombs and discarded burial cloths, spiritual visitations and conversations with the dead  
— these should make us tremble with wonder and fear.”

And then she queries: **“What do you say when you’ve seen such things?**

Nothing makes perfect sense.” She concludes: “Mark is the most believable resurrection story ever told.”

**Now, John’s version of the resurrection is the familiar one, right?**

Compared with John, our Easter Gospel in Mark is stark: raw and honest.

In Mark, no appearance of Jesus whatsoever—alive or dead, did you notice that?

No disciples racing to the tomb.

No confusion where Mary mistakes the risen Jesus for the gardener.

Those tidbits we’d find in John and the other Gospels, but not in Mark.

Even the amazement in Mark’s gospel is tempered, twinged with terror.

**The thing is, in Mark, the “terror doesn’t lead to denial.”**

“And” as Butler Bass continues, “fear doesn’t mean the women remained frightened forever.”

Instead, there is an invitation, an invitation they must have remembered at some point,  
one they eventually followed.

*“Go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee, there you will see him.”*

**He’s going AHEAD**, going back to the beginning, going back to the place where it all started.

In Mark, in the very first chapter we read:

Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the good news of God and

saying, "The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God has come near."

In the next verse he begins to call the disciples, he begins to lay out a plan for healing and liberation.

**Dear ones, I can't blame these faithful women, Mary and Mary and Salome.**

With Jesus they could imagine a different kind of world,  
a world that blessed the outcast and fed the hungry,  
a world that turned the tables of power,

a world that pushed back on the Roman occupation that held them every way they turned.

With Jesus all that was possible... but when he was killed at the hands of the state, everything shifted.

**This morning, we might expect a happy Easter gospel,**

but Mark's telling speaks a truth that many of us name in the quiet moments:

The world is feeling a bit out of control, out of balance.

Is there a way out? Is love stronger than death? Will the hungry be fed?

Our own grief weighs heavy.

**I recently heard snippets** of a conversation with well-known historian of religion John Dominic Crossan.

He was reflecting on resurrection and the perennial debates—What happens in resurrection?

Could it be a metaphor? What does this story really mean?

In this beautiful way, Crossan comments, **"To believe in resurrection is to participate in it."**

**When the women come to anoint Jesus' body that morning after the sabbath,**

it was a risky move, things were politicized, surely dangerous.

But they go, because they must.

And they go because in the frenzy of these last days there hadn't been space to grieve,

to mourn the loss of their friend and teacher,

to mourn the loss of their hope, their imagination for what *could be*.

**"To believe in resurrection is to participate in it."**

**It's courage that has been on my mind and in my heart this year.**

The women's courage, the courage to follow Jesus who goes AHEAD of us.

The courage of which poet and writer Pádraig Ó Tuama,

from the Corrymeela Community in Northern Ireland speaks,

"Courage is the mixture between fear and resolution,

and only exists when we do something about it."

The courage to take one small-big step in recovery, in healing.

The courage to risk and love and trust and speak and act and pray.

The courage to take a breath when your world is falling down around you with grief.

**"To believe in resurrection is to participate in it."**

**During Lent, around the world, Gaza Ceasefire Pilgrimages** have been held

as a way of praying for peace and a ceasefire in the Holy Land.

A local pilgrimage was held last Saturday.

The route was 22 miles in length.

It followed the roads and paths along the Mississippi River

from Brooklyn Park in the north

to the sacred B'dote in the south, at the confluence of the Mississippi and Minnesota Rivers.

While some walked the entire 22 miles, a distance similar to the coastline of Gaza,

I was one of many who joined in for shorter stretches as we were able.

The pilgrimage was grounded in prayer.

We walked and talked, sang and prayed,

embodying a call for an enduring and sustained ceasefire;  
for an immediate flow of food and water, aid, fuel and humanitarian assistance;  
for the release of Israeli hostages still held by Hamas, and Palestinian hostages held by Israel;  
and for an end of the occupation, so a just peace can begin.

Around mile 16 or so, the group paused at Eastcliff, along East River Road.

Jewish and Palestinian-American leaders spoke, we prayed, we sang.

And then a die-in was staged: On the lawn, a huge blue tarp was spread.

A few dozen pilgrims laid down upon it,

keeping still as the names were read aloud of some of the tens of thousands of children and adults  
who have been killed over these months.

Then, the Rabbi leading this portion of the ceremony invited those lying on the tarp

to be begin to move their weary bodies, to slowly sit up, to rise to their feet for more walking.

**“The privilege of the living” she explained, is to have “the strength to bear witness.”**

Dear ones, we are the living.

This Easter morning, every morning we wake with breath in our lungs,

we have the privilege of living,

and we have the grace to witness this new life we and our world so desperately need.

**“To believe in resurrection is to participate in it.”**

**I wonder if that’s part of the raw, struggle for the women at the tomb that morning: Bearing witness.**

Finding the strength and grace to go on at all... takes such energy.

And yet the new life of Jesus Christ gives what is needed to go on.

**“He is going ahead of you to Galilee.”**

That’s the Easter promise that I hear so clearly today.

Often we feel Jesus is with us, at our side, and that is so true,

and yet here, today, we’re reminded that Jesus also goes ahead of us.

There is nothing we will endure,

no place that we will go, where Jesus isn’t already there. (Audrey West)

**Jesus is going on ahead of us.**

How will we traverse the valleys of despair or grief? Jesus is already there.

How will we participate in the justice of God’s reign? Jesus is already there.

How will we go on to tomorrow, with so much uncertainty? Jesus is already there.

Courage, beloved ones, arise out of the promises at the tomb.

We may not have seen it yet, but life is stronger than death.

We may not have lived it yet, but the hungry will be fed.

We may not yet see the way, but there is a way, Jesus’ way.

**“To believe in resurrection is to participate in it.”** One step, one moment at a time.

Grounded in love, held by grace, moved by courage,

for Jesus is going ahead us.

**Let us pray:** Risen one, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us, through Jesus Christ. Amen.