

Easter Homily
Mark 16:1-8, 9-11
Easter B, 12 April 2009, 7:00 am
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Mark 16:1-8, 9-11

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. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. They had been saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But 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. 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." 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.

Now after he rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons. She went out and told those who had been with him, while they were mourning and weeping. But when they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they would not believe it.

Prayer.

The Gospel of Mark is unlike any other of his contemporaries.
There is no running back and forth.
No Peter, or the beloved,
Who race to the tomb;
Outdoing one another to obtain the first peek inside.
There is no encounter with the One
who Mary mistakes as the gardener.
There is no proclamation,
No shouts from the rooftops,
No, nothing.
Mark reports
They fled from the tomb.
They didn't just disperse;
They fled for their lives.
Terror filled them,
For they were afraid, Mark reports.
They were afraid because they were

Exposed beyond the protection of the locked doors of the Upper Room.
Any Temple representative or Roman authority who caught them
Would turn them over for crucifixion
Just like they had Jesus.
Crucifixion is the ultimate statement
Of who is in charge
And what happens to those who steps out of line.
Crucifixion is the example that scares everyone into submission.
Each had just experienced the blood and violence that was done to Jesus.
Each was rightly afraid it could happen to them, too.

Today the women go to anoint the body.
Culturally, this was women's work
But it had the added benefit that they would be less recognizable
Than the more closely associated men who were his disciples.
Mary from Magdala, Mary the Mother of James and Jesus, and Salome come to the tomb
Overcoming their fear of discovery,
Prepared to touch a corpse and be made unclean,
Willing to anoint the corpse and to take the next step in their grief.

Dawn.
Silent.
Still.

A reduced risk of exposure.
The first surprise was finding the tomb unsealed.
The second was a startling revelation:
A young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side
Was apparently waiting inside the tomb for the women to come.
"Alarmed"
Is the word that is used in today's text.
"Scared out of their skin" would be more descriptive!
Here is the witness: "He has been raised."
Here is the evidence: "Look, there is the place they laid him."
Here is the command: "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."
The fact that they returned too afraid to speak
Is indicative of the danger they faced.

This is where Mark ends it.
"It is finished," the Lord said.
Finis.
Done.
That's all there is.

Years later others would attempt to craft a more elegant ending.
But most authorities believe this is where Mark ended it,
And that he ended it here for a reason.

Carl Sandburg, wrote these elegant words:
"I was born in the morning of the world
so I know how morning looks.
Morning looks like people look
like a sea waiting for ships
like a cornfield waiting for corn.
Morning looks like any strong beautiful wanting.
There is your morning, my morning, everybody's morning."

In short, the rest is left is up to us.
The empty sea waits for us to sail the ships.
The empty cornfield waits for us to plant.
The beautifully morning wait for us to create the most of a brand new day.
Likewise for Mark,
The rest is left up to us.
We've been given the witness: "He has been raised."
We've been given the evidence: 2,000 years of witnesses that will not let the story die.
We've been given the command: "Go and tell!"

When it comes to the resurrection of Jesus Christ,
Faith and witness go hand in hand.
It is impossible to have one without the other.
We are told by other authorities, and by other Gospel accounts,
That the women eventually overcame their fear
And ventured out to witness.
Without surprise, initially, others would not believe it.
But with time, and certainly with experience,
Their witness did bear fruit.
The disciples did go to meet Jesus on the road to Emmaus.
They did meet him by the waters of Galilee.

Faith and witness also goes hand in hand for us today.
We are here this morning because we have faith that Jesus is risen from the dead,
And by his victory over death,
So, too, has victory been won for us,
And by God's grace,
We are saved into eternal life.
But, like Mark punctuates his point,
The rest is up to us.

It is our responsibility to take what we believe and to transform it into action.
It's not like the world doesn't want to hear it.
The world is ready for the Good News.
The ground has never been more fertile.
Humanity has never been more receptive to the transformative Word of God.

The global economic downturn has only strengthened the witness.
When people loose a job,
When they're foreclosed on their mortgage,
When their retirement disappears through no fault of their own ...
They are longing, are yearning, are groaning for some Good News.
Vulnerable people, who are searching, but who've not found any other choice, resort to mass murder.
Desperate people, who are trapped in poverty that is so severe that loved ones die of starvation, resort to piracy.
Drugs and violence are the symptoms of people who have no place else to turn, who've never been presented with an alternative, who have never received the witness of Christ's resurrection.

Though there is much good in this world
The world is a dangerous place,
Still filled with much darkness and many shadows.
Fifty generations of saints have gone before us
Attempting to spread the Light
To overcome and overwhelm the darkness that remains,
To witness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ.
Today, this Easter Sunday, the command has now been given to us;
Go and tell.
The responsibility is ours to bear;
Go and tell.
The Light of Jesus Christ is the Light that leads us,
And is the Light that will win victorious,
As God's kingdom will be completed
On earth as it is in heaven.
"Morning looks like any strong beautiful wanting."
This morning is filled with wanting.
This morning wants us to
Go and tell
That Jesus Christ is risen!
Amen.