

Easter

April 12, 2009

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The Lord is risen!

We come to Easter with gladness, joy, hope and expectation. We come with every possible positive emotion of which we are capable. The church is filled with fragrance of lilies and flowers. Wonderful music fills the air thanks to our terrific choirs and faithful guest musicians, who we welcome back this morning. We have dressed in our finest Easter clothes. We have guests coming here for an Easter luncheon and if we are not assisting with the luncheon here, we have special Easter dinner plans with family and friends. Okay, there are no presents - it is not Christmas - but there are baskets filled with candy eggs. The weather is a whole lot better than December - it's Easter - a day bright and joyful. A day to feel good and rejoice.

Everything about Easter is as wonderful as we can make it until we hear the Gospel read from Mark. Mark tells as sparse an Easter story as is possible. There are three women who get us very early to go to the tomb where the body of Jesus has been placed. Since it was the Sabbath when they took him off the cross his body was not properly prepared for burial. So, these women are going to anoint his body for burial according to Jewish custom. Their biggest concern was how they are going to get the enormous rock that seals the entrance to the tomb moved. When they arrive they are surprised to see the rock has been moved. As they cautiously enter the tomb they find a young man dressed in a white robe sitting where the body of Jesus should be lying.

They are alarmed; not daring to hope against hope, not daring to believe that what Jesus told them could possibly be true. They are alarmed. The young man very matter of fact tells them Jesus has been raised and is heading to Galilee where he will meet with his disciples. The women are to go and tell Peter and the others.

Their reaction? The women fled "for terror and amazement had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone for they were afraid." End of story. According to Mark's account of the first Easter there is no joy and thanksgiving but terror, amazement and silence.

Seems like something is missing here, doesn't it? Most of us have watched too much television. We know that a good story can be told and nicely wrapped up in 30 or 60 minutes at most. We don't expect this amazing story of Jesus to end with terrified women running away in fear. We know that is no way to end a story. Did someone steal the last page of Mark's Gospel?

My friends, these women were afraid that what Jesus told them was true. The only thing you can count on is death and taxes. Now death has been taken off the table. That is frightening because it means anything is possible. Up until Easter no matter how meaningful or useless, how blessed or cursed your life, it is going to come to an end in a cemetery. Death is the great equalizer. Rich and poor, famous and ordinary, all roads lead to the graveyard, you can count on that.

We know where the bodies are, we know where to go to pay our respects, we know where to go to grieve. We go to the cemetery to lay flowers and remember.

For all our sorrow and complaining, maybe it is better that way. After all Jesus had some pretty wild ideas. He actually believed that peace was possible among people and nations. Jesus believed people could be transformed by love. Jesus believed in helping people who seemed helpless. Jesus thought children mattered. He believed in loving our enemies and forgiving those who hurt us. He did not think possessions were the measure of a person's worth. Jesus did not believe that suffering is a sign of God's absence. He believed that every one of us had the God given power to change the world if we had faith but the size of a mustard seed. Jesus really believed that death did not have the final word. He really believed that. So on this day, let's remember him, let's pay our respects and head back to business as usual.

Only Jesus is not there. He has gone on ahead of us and calls us to follow. He is calling us into a future that God is creating. His way has been affirmed by God as the way of life. God fully participates and sustains this way of life. The resurrection is our confirmation and our calling to continue the way of Jesus. We are to go forth expectantly into the future where death has no dominion and where there is possibility beyond our understanding.

The three women were the ones who had the faith and courage to go and do what needed to be done. They were worried about how they were going to enter the tomb because an enormous stone had been rolled in their way. What they learned is that God would roll the stone away. God rolls stones away even in our lives. It is God who opens new possibilities where problems and roadblocks seem to stand in the way. If we loosen our grip on business as usual we will discover there is more to life than death.

Easter means that God is alive and active in our world to bring new life out of grief and loss. Easter means we have been set free from the dominion of death, set free to enjoy the possibility of new life in Christ. Easter means God has triumphed even if it scares us to think so.

The Lord is risen! God has won the day! We are free to live into the possibility of new life in Christ.

Alleluia!