

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

It's early morning, the first day of the week, three women approaching the tomb of Jesus. They go with the intention of anointing his dead body, an act of care, a ritual act usually done before sealing a body in a tomb. But who is going to roll that large stone away from the entrance for them? But the stone has already been rolled away! It's not a body laid there, it's a young man in a white robe sitting there.

The women were alarmed, maybe even verging on fear. But the young man tells them not to be alarmed, he tells them "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."

The Easter proclamation, "he has been raised," "he is risen." The message of hope, the message we love to hear, the stone is rolled away, the tomb empty, death is defeated, he is risen. Yet the women fled the tomb, filled with terror and amazement, they say nothing for they were afraid. Afraid on the very first Easter? That doesn't sound right.

But then again, perhaps we should consider our own reactions on this Easter morning. Are we afraid too? After we leave here this morning, after the music, the celebration, are we afraid we simply go home for a nice Easter dinner and a long nap? Are we afraid we will find the tomb empty? Are we afraid we perhaps will meet Jesus waiting down the road for us? Are we afraid maybe he will ask us to do something, to challenge us, are we afraid maybe this is the day that our living God will confront us and propel us into some uncomfortable scene where we might have to make a difference?

Ah! Maybe that's what concerns us, even alarms us. Yes we go to church every Sunday, once or twice a month, well, at least on Christmas and Easter, yes we believe it all but what does this have to do with life? Don't mess around with career paths, vacation plans, retirement plans, don't want to do more than I'm already doing. Don't want to see Jesus down the road somewhere waiting for me, knowing full well that any delay is of my own making. No wonder the women fled and said nothing to no one.

This seems like an odd way to end the Gospel according to St. Mark, doesn't it? Fleeing from Jesus' empty tomb, terrified and amazed, afraid to speak to anyone. Now I am one of those pastors who believe that the original version of Mark's gospel does end here, the extra verses you find in some versions of the Bible were added on. When I look at the extra verses I think they really add nothing but more questions than answers. But I admit I'm curious about our ending this morning.

Mark, the author of our gospel challenges us to encounter the reality of the resurrection, but also the terror and amazement the three women felt that first

Easter morning. Mark wants us to understand what they experienced. Death was and is a notorious adversary, but Jesus has won the victory, death is defeated, the resurrection of our Lord is reality, the most powerful reality, life changing reality, life-giving reality. And you my dear ones, my brothers and sisters, you do not have to die to live the new life that Christ has won for us! We are baptized, baptized into his death and resurrection, we are liberated from the anxiety and fear of death, of dying, we are free, free to live the life Jesus calls us to live, to live as his emissaries, here and now, spreading the good news of salvation in our lives and in our words.

We are free from the power of death, saved by grace through faith. Yet even so we often have some fear, some apprehension of death, of dying, the unknown. That's because we are human, even Jesus had some apprehension about what was coming as he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, but he yielded to God's will, trusting in the power of God to deliver him. Jesus was not disappointed. And we won't be either. God has swallowed up death forever and you and I, our fears notwithstanding are challenged to show the world that Jesus has gone ahead of us to Galilee, and we are going to meet him there.

Christ is Risen!

AMEN