

April 12, 2009

Easter Morning  
Mark 16:1-8

“Jesus Lives”

Blessed Easter morning to each of you. May we have on our lips Scripture that says – “It’s good Lord to be Here!”

The old old story has been retold once more in this past Holy Week.

Did you hear it?

It was just one week ago that we gathered to hear about two processions that entered Jerusalem, one was a show of power and one was a show of love.

And we were challenged to reflect on which procession we are marching in.

And we heard on Thursday the story of salvation history for the Jews, the Passover, and shared in the Seder meal.

Then we participated in the story of Jesus’ final days – Gethsemane, Golgatha, and we left in darkness.

On Friday we relived Jesus’ death through Scripture and Faure’s Requiem.

Today we begin the great 50 day Easter Season.

Our reading from Mark’s gospel begins with – “When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome brought spices so that they might go and anoint Jesus.”

They kept the Sabbath; and now they were going to the tomb to anoint Jesus’ body, according to their tradition.

Our Judeo-Christian tradition is like a canopy that we can gather under together. Our tradition has power to move us along when we are lost, bewildered, overwhelmed, grief struck.

I have seen it at funerals. The hymns, the scripture, the prayers, the rituals, give strength to the mourning.

For the two Mary’s and Salome, it was their tradition and their love for Jesus that sent them out to the tomb early on that first Easter morning.

Their tradition called them to keep vigil with the body – anointing, praying, weeping, remembering, loving.

There was no –“I want to remember him the way he was.” They went to the tomb, to the place of death.

I know some of you who are keeping vigil with the dying, with the sick, - people for whom death and the tomb are close enough to touch.

It takes courage to go with our spices to the tomb. The women went.....

There was one problem with their plan –they hadn't really thought the whole thing through. Who was going to move the stone from in front of the tomb? It would weigh hundreds of pounds; and once put in place would be difficult to move.

They set out for the tomb not sure exactly how it would all play out.

They didn't have it all together before they set out. They were going to need some help with this one – some grace.

“Perhaps we are never closer to the Easter celebration than in that fearful, hopeful, vulnerable mood in which we wait for God to move the stone which is too big for us.”

How many of us have stones in our lives which are way too big to move on our own? This one doesn't seem to want to budge!.....

Am I ever in need of God's grace/God's help with this big boulder!

And then we discover that the stone has been moved.

We have no idea how.

It's the wonderful and amazing part of our Christian story.

Stones are moved and we didn't do it!

Thanks be to God!

They go into the tomb expecting to find Jesus' body, instead there is a young man dressed in a white robe who says – “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.”

The messenger announces – “Behold I bring you good tidings of great joy to all people – ‘he has been raised. He is not here.’”

Jesus has been here. He has experienced suffering and death, but he is not here now.

Christ is Risen. Jesus Lives!

This is our Easter Proclamation.

“There is a power and presence moving through our lives and through the world that brings life out of places of darkness and death.”

“The resurrection is not about the denial of death. It is God's victory over death.”

As the hymn says: “He Lives. He lives. Christ Jesus lives today.

He walks with me and talks with me along life's narrow way.

He lives, He lives, salvation to impart;

You ask me how I know he lives – he lives within my heart.”

Easter is not just a message for the end of our lives; it is a message of hope in our everyday lives. God has the power to transform all things. “Behold, I make all things new.”

There are four gospel accounts of the resurrection. In Mark we have the earliest story of Easter in the New Testament. In Matthew, Luke and John the Easter morning story is not the last chapter in the book; they follow with post-resurrection stories of the risen Christ appearing to his disciples.

But in Mark, today’s reading is the end of the gospel.

It is such an abrupt ending that some scholars believe that the real ending of the gospel has been lost. There have been two endings written after Mark to try and compensate for this abrupt ending. If you look in the Bible you will see printed two alternate endings to Mark’s gospel – “the shorter ending of Mark and the longer ending of Mark.” As it stands the end of the story at verse eight leaves us with – “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.” There is no going and spreading the good news; the gospel ends in fear.

Perhaps we are being invited to complete the story ourselves..... to take our understanding of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and live out that story in our own lives. We are witnesses.....We are the body of Christ..... The unfinished conclusion shifts the burden to us – we who hear the story are now responsible to share it, to live it.

Jesus will go before us, the Pioneer and Perfecter of our faith, a figure beckoning us from beyond, to take up the cross and follow.

“As long as the darkness of doubt and despair continues to cast its somber shadow from ghetto to suburb, from factories to farms, there will be souls wanting to hear and received the report of Christ’s resurrection not as an idle tale but as the liberating and transforming truth.”

I end with an Easter story.

Many of us read last week about the murder of Wendy Ladner-Beaudry in Vancouver's Pacific Spirit Park while out jogging.

One article I read said this: "yet even as they mourn her death, friends and family of the 53 year old victim, a dynamo community activist and scion of the city's prominent pioneer Ladner family, say they are determined not to let that climate of fear serve as Ms. Ladner-Beaudry's legacy.

They vow to restore Pacific Spirit Park to normalcy, despite Friday's homicide, perhaps with a massive public stroll through the park.

"That park has to be a place for good people, not bad people" declared the victim's brother, Peter Ladner. "If people don't go in there, then we abandon that huge treasure to fears and people who do things like this."

A friend told about a conversation she had with Wendy just the day before she was murdered. "We chatted about doing a project with a bunch of African kids who had seen such horrific things in their refugee camps, and integrating them into the community through soccer. Wendy was a true person of conviction.

Wendy would want this to galvanize us, to take this and make something out of it. She had a saying she liked to use – "There are cracks in the wall so the sun can shine through."

Jesus Lives!

Amen. Thanks be to God!