



Sunday, April 4, 2021
Mark 16:1-8

Pastor Chris Marien

Easter Sunday 2021

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

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Grace to you and peace from God our father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

I was not there, at the foot of the cross when Jesus died. I did not feel the earthquake. I did not experience the darkness that covered the land. I did not stand with Mary, the mother of Jesus, as she wept. I did not bear the burden of the image of my savior and friend dying on the cross like the disciple John. I did not hear Jesus speak the words, "It is finished." I did not see Jesus take his last breath.

I was not there in the garden when the women came early to anoint their dead Savior with spices. I was not there to see the stone rolled away or to hear the angels ask, "why do you seek the living among the dead?" I was not there when Mary stayed weeping outside the empty tomb as Peter and John ran away – when Mary heard her name called and caught her breath in her lungs – denying the possibility of new life – as she heard her name called by the one she thought lost forever – only to know it was Jesus by the way he called her name. I was not there.

I know these events only by the stories told – passed down from one generation to another. From grandparent to grandchild – from father to son and mother to daughter – from brother to sister – the stories spoken in whispers in underground churches and in waiting rooms and house churches and Sunday School classrooms and sanctuaries like this one and in gatherings of two or three and hundreds and thousands. Stories spoken in moments of celebration at baptisms, confirmations, weddings and in moments of painful reminders of suffering in hospital rooms, courtrooms, funerals and standing at the gravesides of those we love. They are the stories of God's promise reminded to us. This is how I know the stories that bring us to this day – this Easter day. Stories of celebration, welcome, anticipation, patience, loyalty, love, journey, betrayal, abuse, murder, death, burial. And on this Easter day – the story of new life - resurrection, trust, invitation, welcome, new life.

I was not there. And yet I know these stories and so do you. They are the stories revealed in every day of this life we live. The stories of Good Friday and the power of death are written in the scars on your skin and the wounds healed over on your hearts. I have wiped away more tears than I can count. I have walked more steps alongside you into cemeteries where the power of death led us to believe the last word was the dirt scattered over the one we love and the last bit of ash caught by the wind and carried away. You know what I am talking about. That catch in your breath when you wait by the bedside of someone you love – wondering if the breath they just released will be their last. I was not at the foot of the cross but I have been in the ICU room, with many of you as pastor. And this past year, as a son, holding my mom's hand, when she took her last breath. I have spoken the news of the power of death to spouses, parents, children, and the response is so often the same. A cry of pain. The cascade of tears. The shattering of a heart at the news that your entire world is about to change. I did not realize that in so many of those moments in your lives and in mine – I have held my breath, afraid if I let go – if I allow that breath of hope to exhale from my lungs that the hope for the revelation of God's promised eternal life might go with it.

We have journeyed far in this season of Lent – maybe farther than any other Lent we have known. We have, most likely, carried our own fears and hopes as we've traveled through the wilderness spaces of these last weeks. But I know that you have traveled so much farther than just these last weeks of Lent. We have traveled



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through countless days of agonizing pandemic purgatory. We have journeyed through the mountains and valleys of life – we have shed tears and argued our anger. We have taken out our frustration at something by betraying the love we have for those closest to us. We have struggled to find moments to celebrate in these long miles of pandemic, and pain, and Lent, and in these holy days that bring us to this day.

If you have grown weary in this season; if you have become overwhelmed; if you are living with fear or anxiety or worry about what lies ahead; if the swirl of holy week or two weeks ago or the last 56 weeks have become intense; if time is moving strangely; if grief has been a traveling companion; if the ground beneath you has given away; if resurrection seems less than certain. And my question is this, “are you ready to breathe yet?” I wonder if this Easter day could be your invitation to breathe; to make space with the weariness, the fear, the ache, the defiance of what can be because we have lived for too long with what has been. This is the day to breathe. To let go of what we have held onto all this time. I am so often the guy who is ready to move from resurrection hope to resurrection reality. I prefer to live my days in the promised truth of the stories I have been told.

But good God, it is hard. Yes, even in the light of this resurrection day, trusting in the resurrection stories I have been told is hard. I have watched our world double over on itself. As one author said, with the speed of technology, we have the access to all the world’s suffering in a matter of minutes. Never before have we been so surrounded by so much suffering as we are in every waking moment of life today. Funny though we do not have to go very far outside our door to know what suffering looks like. It is the fear of those who disagree with us on anything. It is the consequence of being told what we think we want to hear instead of hearing the truth. It is the surprise of disease and the dependence on one more medication. It is the pollution and abuse of creation for the selfish needs of the individual and the constant grab for one more dollar of profit. It is the inequality of country against county and person against person. It is the haunting disdain for another human being – so little respect or love for the life of the other – never realizing we are simply looking into our own reflection with such revulsion. Good God it is hard. So, hold your breath. Because this is all there is.

Or maybe, just maybe the stories that have been passed down from generation to generation – whispered to us of a God who loves us – stories of a God who dies for us – stories of a God who rises from the dead for us – what if those stories are true? What if all the stories of miracles and teaching - love for the least - looking for the lost – dying on a cross for us – what if the stories are true? I was not there when Jesus died. I was not there when the women found the stone rolled away. But I have been in those moments and I have seen you in those moments – standing by your side to welcome, to celebrate, to grieve, to pray, to question, to remind, and I will tell you – in every one of those moments – I have seen, in each of you, the face of one Jesus calls by name – reminding all of us, again and again, that the promise of God in the death and resurrection of Jesus is for you, for now, forever. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.