

“Just the Beginning”

Mark 16:1-8

Easter Sunday

April 4, 2021

Pastor Andy Kinsey

***“Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb.
They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.”***

- Mark 16:8

Prayer of Preparation

Risen Christ, meet us in the dawn and shake us to the core: Remind us that nothing can overcome the power of sin and death and that you are the way, the truth, and the life. Amen!

Easter Message

There is a funny little story about a woman named Carol who was the organist at her church. She was an outstanding musician, but she did something no organist, or pastor, should ever do. She overslept on Easter morning and missed the sunrise service. Obviously, she was embarrassed. Of course, the minister and the church forgave her, but they did tease her a little, but always lovingly and in good fun.

The next Easter, however, her phone rang at 5:00 in the morning. Jolted awake by the loud ringing, she scrambled to answer it. It was the minister, and he said, “Carol, it’s Easter morning! The Lord is risen! And I suggest you do the same!”¹

Dear church: The Lord is risen – and I pray you have done the same!

Indeed, I am glad that you have not overslept this Easter morning, and I am glad that you are able to celebrate the most important day in the Christian year – the day followers of Jesus went to the tomb early in the morning and found it empty.

And so, no matter where you are at this moment I welcome you on this special day! The Lord is risen, and I pray you the same!

¹ James Moore, *Too Good To Be True* (Nashville, TN: Dimensions for Living, 1994).

What a Year!

Over the last year, we have been on a journey like no other, at least like no other in my lifetime. I don't think any person could have predicted on Easter last year what we were going to witness.

In fact, as I look back, I can remember folks saying to us that following Easter the pandemic would cease. Come the election, the pandemic would be behind us. Come the New Year, no more virus.

As I have come to see, predictions about the future are a great deal like horoscopes: futile and wrong. The good news, though, amidst all this is that God has been with us and we have found ways of responding to God faithfully.

We have been able, because of the additional giving of so many people, to connect with the folks we could not have imagined, all online. We have also been able, because of the generosity of this church, to assist probably more people over the last year than in recent memory. By God's grace, we have been able to provide care and help to those who are lonely and isolated more than we thought possible.

I share this not to gild the Easter Lilly this morning, but to recognize a profound truth on Easter: that after what seems like thirteen months of Lent, the hope of the risen Christ is with us. All the bad and the ugly cannot erase that truth.

As Mary Magdalene and the other women realized on that first Easter, it really is *just the beginning* of something very new: despite crucifixion on Friday, resurrection comes on Sunday! Just as Jesus said (Mk. 8:31)!

As we sang a moment ago in Charles Wesley's hymn, echoing Paul's words in First Corinthians: "Lives again our glorious King, Where O death is now thy sting?" (1 Cor. 15:54-55). The grave cannot boast! Only God can boast now!²

The grain of wheat that fell into the earth on Friday did not remain just a single grain. Rather, it died, and because it died, it now bears much fruit (Jn. 12:24).

A couple weeks ago, I was listening to Will Willimon of Duke Divinity School share about Easter, and he made an interesting observation. He said that it "will take courage to preach on Easter this year."³ Why? Well, according to

² Charles Wesley, "Christ the Lord Is Risen Today," *The United Methodist Hymnal* (Nashville, TN: The Publishing House, 1989).

³ William Willimon, "Preaching Holy Week in the Middle of a Pandemic Again," *The Christian Century* (March 15, 2021) at www.christiancentury.org.

Willimon, we have been living in a land of Good Fridays and Holy Saturdays for so long that it has become commonplace to preach on the litanies of suffering. He might be on to something.⁴

Over the last year, we have watched loved-ones and families members mourn and grieve, often from a distance, often only at the graveside. We have witnessed grandparents try to “hug” their grandkids, often from afar. To be sure, we can easily pull out our lists of pain and despair, frustration and disappointment.

Love Does Anyway

Maybe we are more like the women in Mark’s Gospel than we realize! We go to the tomb with a heaviness of heart, and we cannot fathom resurrection, even though Christ told us (Mk. 8:38)! We go not expecting to encounter Risen Life! It all seems so hopeless, so overwhelming.

Indeed, I really do not think Mary Magdalene and the other women went to the tomb on that dark morning thinking God had raised Jesus. In fact, they say as much when they ask, “Who will roll the stone away for us?” They obviously didn’t have a plan in place! What were they thinking going to the tomb? It was dangerous. Why take the risk? More importantly, perhaps, why get out of bed so early?

I believe that one of the reasons they got out of bed early on that first Easter morning was because of the love they had for their friend; they went that morning because that is what love does.⁵ Despite the risks, despite the hour of the day, love goes anyway!

When the baby cries at night, love gets up. When a child calls on the phone upset, love responds. When a friend needs help, love listens.

When I get to heaven, and I don’t mean to be presumptuous in believing so, but by God’s grace, I will – when I get to heaven, I want to ask Mary, “Mary, what made you go to the tomb so early?” And if I am not mistaken, I think I will hear her say, “Because that is what love does!” Even when we do not know who is going to roll away the stone! That’s what love does! Even when we do not know what the day will bring, love gets up and gets going.

Love does remarkable things despite the challenges! Even as we wait and pray at the bedside of a family member, or as we look through the glass of a

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Special thanks to Reverend Michael Curry for these insights for the Easter Message.

nursing home, or as we reckon with prejudice and violence of all kinds, or as we deal with the virus and pandemic – love proclaims, “Alleluia anyway”!⁶

Future-Tense-God

And because of what *God has done in raising Christ*, in defeating death by death, we can step into the future with confidence (2 Cor. 5:19). After all, it is in the future that we will be spending the rest of our lives. It is there that Jesus will be waiting for us (Mk. 16:7).⁷

In other words, Christ is already preparing a place for you here and for us as a congregation! He is already out ahead of us, turning back stones, setting the course for our mission, breaking through obstacles, even when we don't understand!⁸ After all, this is who God is, as when God says to Moses: “I will be who I will be” (Ex. 3:14). Note the future tense!

It is what the apostle Paul gets at when describing his own life as “forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead” (Phil. 3:13). God is a God of new beginnings and new futures. It is what Jesus teaches when he says, “we are to keep our hands to plow and not look back” (Lk. 9:62), and it is what Mary and the women learn on Easter: what they thought was an ending was really only just the beginning of a new future (Mark 16:5-6).

Dear Church: Easter is just the beginning! No matter the stones that might cover our hopes, love is doing a new thing – anyway, anyhow! No matter what!

Dear Church: Christ is risen! Thanks be to God!

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Peter Marty, “Preaching Easter: Step into the Future,” *The Christian Century* (March 24, 2021) at www.christiancentury.org.

⁸ Ibid.