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## The First Sunday of Easter

### The Resurrection of Our Lord

March 31, 2024

#### Sermon

#### Mark 16:1-8

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"

But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.

"Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.' "

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

It's not so hard to be happy on Easter. I'd rather it was 60° outside and that the sun was shining, but it's pretty happy inside. It was warm downstairs and the breakfast was great and the smiles were wide. Up here the purple is gone and the white is out and the flowers are beautiful. Easter is a good day and it's the best day for Christians because Easter is the Gibraltar of our faith. **If Christ has not been raised, my preaching is useless and so is your faith. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead!** The Paschal Candle is burning and the alleluias are back. It's easy to be happy on Easter.

But it wasn't so easy on Easter, not at first. All four Gospel writers—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—tell us about Easter, and nobody was too happy. Mary Magdalene saw the empty tomb and ran; she was terrified. The women who heard what the angel said were afraid. When the men heard the news, they called it nonsense. The two disciples who walked to Emmaus were heartbroken and bitter. When Jesus appeared to the apostles on Easter evening, they were **startled and frightened** and thought he was ghost. When Mark tells us about the women—and Mark's account is the one we heard today, he shared this: **Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone because they were afraid.** If you and I had been in Jerusalem that Sunday morning and not in Mequon, we might not have been so happy on Easter.

Of course, everything changed when Jesus showed up. Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene and she worshiped him. He appeared to the women on the road and they were filled with joy and raced to tell the news. Jesus stayed for supper with the Emmaus disciples and opened their eyes to know him and they remembered that their hearts had been burning as he spoke to them on the road. Jesus appeared to the apostles at night and they were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Wherever and whenever Jesus appeared for the next 40 days, everybody was happy. Because of Easter it was easy to be happy. That's how all the Gospels end.

Except for Mark. Mark doesn't end with happy. You heard it: **Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone because they were afraid.** That's where Mark ends. This ending of Mark's Gospel has confused Bible scholars for centuries. Some suggest that the last page of Mark's

original manuscript was torn and that the happy ending was lost. Happier endings have been appeared over the centuries but most people are convinced that Mark didn't write them. We'll never know for sure and this doesn't really bother us or trouble our faith; the other Gospel writers tell us all about Easter joy. But Mark seems to give us an opportunity to see some first impressions of Easter morning: not everyone was happy. And then Mark allows us to look inside ourselves and realize that not everything is happy with us either. Behind the white lilies and the wide smiles there are things that leave us staggering and baffled and sometimes we trudge away from Easter filled with fear. Perhaps Mark helps us remember that sometimes

### Easter Shakes the Soul

There were usually muggers on the Jerusalem streets at night, so the women waited for dawn to start their trek to the tomb. There was no question in their minds about Jesus being dead. At least two of them had watched Joseph and Nicodemus lay Jesus' body on the stone slab. What they had forgotten and what was worrying them as they walked was the stone the men had rolled in front of the tomb entrance: How could they get into the tomb to anoint Jesus' body? What they didn't know was that they didn't need to get inside because Jesus wasn't there. By this time Jesus had already become alive, maybe during the earthquake that scared the tomb guards away. By this time Jesus had descended into hell to proclaim his victory over the Satan. By this time an angel had already moved the stone, not to let Jesus out but to let the women in. They knew none of this when they got to the garden and then, **when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.** Oh, really!

The young man was an angel and what he said was short and sweet: **Don't be alarmed. You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified.** Yup. That's who they were looking for. And he was dead. We heard him die; We saw him dead. He didn't twitch, he didn't breathe, he didn't do anything. And then the angel said, **He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him.** They looked and the body they had seen lying there just three days before was gone. **But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.** Do you have any idea what was going through their brains? Their hearts were racing, their palms were sweating, goosebumps were crawling up the back of their necks. What to do!? The angel told them; it was easy: Jesus is alive. Don't be alarmed. See the evidence. Go and tell. What did they do? **Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone because they were afraid.** Happy came later, but happy wasn't their first impression. They were shivering, dazed, tongue-tied, and terrified. They ran. That first Easter was shaking their souls. We know how they felt. Easter Sunday doesn't take all the sadness away. The bills come due on the first of the month and April 1 starts at midnight. Treatments start again tomorrow. There's tension in the air about the future of the churches we love. The list could be longer. Our souls still shake on Easter.

But it isn't just what's around us that shakes us. Easter shakes us. I mean the resurrection of Jesus shakes our souls. When he came back to life after he died, Jesus did something no human being has ever done by himself. This was no after death or near-death experience; this wasn't seeing some bright lights and some white angels. Jesus was deader than a doornail for at least 30 hours and then he came back to life. His heart began to beat, his brain began to function, his lungs began to fill with air all with the magnificent power of the triune God. And all at once it dawns on you that Jesus is more than a baby in a manger, more than a teacher or a healer or a smiling Good Shepherd. This is the Son of God who existed from eternity in the houses of heaven with the Father and the Spirit. When time began, he created all things in heaven and on earth and until time ends he will have authority over all things in heaven and earth. The Son of God and Son of man was and is and is to come. He is the first and the last and the beginning and the end. It is staggering to know this. It takes our breath away. It boggles our imagination. We say it so easily on Easter: Christ is arisen! But think of this: God is arisen! God is risen indeed! My word. Easter shakes our souls.

If it was God who rose, it was also God who died. He died to take our sins away. It's so easy to underestimate sins; we do it all the time. Ya, I know I sin, but you know how it is. Here's the truth we must face: Sin is not like dirty clothes you throw in the washing machine and they come out clean. You don't get rid of sins with good behavior. Sins don't get forgotten because your parents were Christians or because your name is on a church

membership list. It took the death of God to get rid of sin; nothing else could do it. It took God's blood to make the sacrifice. It took God's pain to pay the price. Only God could say **It is finished** and it was. We stop in our tracks. That's what it took to save us? That's what it took. We are stunned. We are amazed. Easter shakes our souls.

The God-man who died and the God-man who rose is the God-man who calls us to be his witnesses in the world. The resurrection of Jesus guarantees forgiveness and assures heaven but it also provides a purpose for living. Go and tell, the young man said. And Jesus says, Go and tell. Do you see an option here? Can you really take this or leave it? The thought is overwhelming and intimidating. It calls for personal courage to speak to those we know; it calls for financial sacrifice to send workers to those we don't know. It calls on us to look at people and at life from a totally new perspective. And so sometimes Easter shakes our souls.

We can't know for sure how St. Mark intended to tell the story of Easter but the words he wrote describe first impressions and first reactions at the empty tomb. **Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone because they were afraid.** When you and I stare into the miracle and the majesty and the magnificence of the resurrection, we can come away shaking and dazed and tongue-tied and terrified, too. But first impressions don't last. Like those women, we have come to see Jesus. He has appeared to us in Word and Sacrament again and again and again. We see him through the power of the Spirit; we see him with the eyes of faith. The shivers turn to steel, the confusion becomes certainty, our tongues become megaphones of peace. And we walk into our lives not shaking but rejoicing. Christ is arisen! **He is risen indeed.** And that's why Easter makes us happy. Amen.

*This sermon was preached by Pastor James Tiefel.*