

April 12, 2020
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Mark 16: 1-8
1 Corinthians 15: 36-49



We just heard the earliest Gospel story of the resurrection . Mark’s gospel was written about 70 CE. Each of the gospel authors tells his version of Easter morning; each one is a bit different. Mark’s gospel originally ended at verse 8; the women leave the tomb and tell no one.

In Matthew’s telling, two women go to the tomb instead of three. There’s an earthquake when an angel rolls back the stone to open the tomb. The angel tells them that Jesus isn’t there, “so they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy; and they run to tell the others.”

In Luke’s telling, he names three women plus he references “the other women”; it would seem a whole group of women go to the tomb together. There’s not an earthquake because the tomb is already open. Two angels appear instead of one.

In John, Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb alone. She saw the tomb was opened; she runs to get two men. All three run back to the tomb; no angels speak to them, they simply find the burial linens folded up, empty. The men go home, and Mary lingers.

All of the gospels go on to tell of appearances of Jesus – post-resurrection stories written latter, but none of them tell of the same event.

Something happened on that first day of the week. If a video camera had been there, we might know more. How many women where there—one, two, three, or more? Were there angels, one or two? Did the earth quake? Did any of the men show up? Do the women tell or keep quiet? The exact details are unknown, but I don’t know that the details really matter that much. The point is something happened. Something important happened that is beyond comprehension.

I love the story of a little boy who went to church for the very first time on Easter Sunday. His family lived just down the street from a church. They passed by every day, but they were not church goers, so he had never been inside. One day his mother was walking with him to first grade, as they passed the church he asked her if he could see inside. She told him he could go Sunday if he wanted to. He was curious, so he did. When he came home from church on Easter, his parents asked him what he thought about it. What had he learned? He replied, “Aliens came from outer space, lived on earth a while and then left. God is one of those aliens and when we die we go in a space ship to live with God. It’s kinda like ET.” His parents looked at each other in confusion and concern and asked him, “Are you sure that’s what they told you at the church?” “Well, not really” he said, “but you wouldn’t believe what they said happened if I told you!”

Resurrection is, if we are honest, a bit hard for people to swallow or confusing at best, but often those of us reared in the Christian faith dare not say such things. The little boy had no qualms admitting that this resurrection story is just a little too far fetched especially for those not accustomed to hearing it. The little boy wasn’t the only one who had a hard time with the story. People of the first century did too.

Our other scripture this morning was from the Apostle Paul’s letter to the church in Corinth. This account was written earlier than the gospels about 54 CE, about 20 years after

Jesus was crucified and 20 years before the gospels that took shape near the end of the first century. Paul's experience of Christ came as a blinding light not at the mouth of a tomb.

Paul's main message to his churches is his central core belief of the good news: Christ is Alive- and Christ offers new life by the grace of God to all. Paul preaches crucifixion and resurrection throughout all his letters to the early churches. But not everybody agrees today as to what happened on that first Easter- not everyone agreed then- the gospel writers didn't even agree. So I suppose it is okay if we don't all agree to the same version of the story. Some believe in a bodily resurrection ; some in a spiritual resurrection.

Those new in hearing Paul's account didn't understand his resurrection talk either. Some were bold enough to ask, Paul writes about the question: "Someone ask, 'how are the dead raised? With what kind of body to they come?'" Paul being the good teacher turns to the object lesson they can all understand. He uses a familiar metaphor. What you plant is a bare seed , right? A grain of some sort. But what comes up is a different kind of body. The crop that comes up doesn't look at all like that round seed you planted; you planted a tiny seed, it shoots up a tall slender stalk. Furthermore Paul says, look around the world; we all don't have the same body. Fish have a body with fins not like ours at all. Birds have feathers; other animals have fur. Each body is appropriate for each one's habitat. Even the heavenly bodies are different; sun and moon are not the same type body. Paul says there are all kinds of earthly bodies for our earthly lifetime, but he says there is also a spiritual body for immortal lifetime. Paul notes, these earthly bodies of ours are not made to last eternity. They wear out; they get diseases,;they even get crucified, they will die. They are made to die. Our spiritual bodies are different. They last forever. He calls it a mystery! It is a mystery all right. Paul talks about that often too. The mystery of our faith.

Paul's writings are clear- new life comes when we let go of the old. New life comes when the former selves are transformed. New life in Christ is about living a new way, and it always is very different than the old way.

The earth proclaims resurrection. One of the things I love about living in Nebraska - (anywhere north of tropical south Texas really) - Spring! Spring is the earth doing resurrection theology. Brown, dead lifeless yards, gardens and trees all join in a chorus to proclaim life. Green shoots, bulbs, buds say, "ha! You thought we were dead. We appeared so, but we are alive! tada!" Life returns to the earth each spring, so the celebration of resurrection faith coincides with the greening of the earth, the greatest object lesson ever.

We are living the mystery right now. We don't know all the details of what's going to happen and when. People want to 'get back to normal' and 'get back to the way it was.' Resurrection isn't about going back to the way it was. It is about something new coming to life. We can grieve what we are missed, they way it used to be, the way we knew. But in the midst of the mystery of what will be, we can also celebrate. The world has paused. The entire world has paused, and we all have an opportunity to push the reset button.

We can examine what it is that is really important. We can decide what is priority for our life. Many are realizing that the busyness of life before was stealing away life and distancing relationships. Many are seeing all those things that were so stressfully important before, the ones that went away with the delete event button on our calendars- weren't that essential after all. Many are learning that all those shopping trips weren't really necessary after all. Maybe a leaner, minimalist lifestyle is easier; it weighs less on the psyche also.

In the pause, we can deepen our spiritual readings and prayer life. We can learn and grow into greater understandings discovering new insights in familiar stories and reading

with new eyes. In the pause, we have also seen the spotlight shine on the injustice and inequities in our society. We see the disproportionate of suffering based on generations of racial disparity. We see the failure of health care systems under equipped. We see ways that we can be better.

Certainly, we want folks employed. We want to come out of this pause. We aren't supposed to stay in the tomb forever. But when we do emerge - and we will - we have the gift for new life. We have the chance to learn from the pause like the emerging spring that takes shape beneath the frozen winter ground.

"Christ is alive" is never about returning to what was. It is embracing the newness of what will be. Christ is alive in leading us into the way of love and grace. Alleluia. Amen.