

Easter Sunday

3/31/24

Mark 16:1-8

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The pearly half-light of first dawn
describes not what is,
but what is not.

Like a Zen painting, negative space defines the essence of that which is.

He is not here.

The stone is rolled away.

The tomb is empty.

If you're looking for a picture of Jesus being resurrected, you're not going to find much. On our bulletin cover today we have a picture of the already resurrected Jesus, pulling saints out of their tombs. You can find . . . pictures of Christ in majesty, seated at the right hand of God, pictures of Jesus in the upper room appearing to the disciples, showing them the wounds in his body. There are pictures of Jesus frying fish on the beach, even a little Rembrandt etching of Jesus, dressed as a 17th century Dutch gardener with straw hat and rake, appearing to Mary Magdalene.

But of that moment connecting time and eternity, the instant when Jesus arose from the dead, there's not much, throughout the history of art from any century. It's as though the act of resurrection belongs to God alone. You can't see it. That door is closed, because to see resurrection is like seeing the face of God. The only way you can describe it is to show what has been, and is no more, or to show the new, which has become something else. What happened on Easter was not resuscitation, not bringing the old back to life. It's not like what happened to Lazarus, or the son of the widow of Nain, or Jairus' daughter. Jesus' resurrection is a model of transformation into a whole new mode of existence.

While we don't have a picture of resurrection, though, we do have a sacrament that's all about it, all about being born into a new way of being. And that sacrament is baptism. One of the two sacraments that Jesus himself initiated, a passing over from death into new life. Many hundreds of years ago, when the Great Vigil was the central

event of the Christian year in Jerusalem and in Constantinople and Rome, Easter was the only time of year when you could be baptized. Candidates for baptism, after years of instruction and months of preparation, fasted for two days before they were completely immersed in the waters of baptism.

Many of us don't remember our own baptism: maybe it happened when we were infants, or maybe it was just a long time ago. But these vows that we will say together today at the baptism of Brynden and Nina Lazenby, these vows open the door to eternity and to new life. In the water of baptism, even a little Episcopalian sprinkle, or a whole dunking in a tub, we are not just cleansed from sin. Baptism is a symbolic death that we share with Jesus, that we might join with him in resurrection. In the water of baptism, even more so with a full immersion, we are buried with Jesus as he was buried in the tomb. He is with us to lessen the fear of being submerged, whether by water, or by scary events that happen in each of our lives from time to time. And he is with us as we rise from difficulties, or come up out of the water dripping, into new life, the glory of Easter morning, and the arms of our community. That meeting is a memorial of the first resurrection meeting, there at the empty tomb.

Whenever resurrection happens, it takes place, not just in real time, but also at the intersection of this age and the age to come. That's why the gospel gives us, not a narrative of Jesus' rising to life, but a witness to the empty tomb. For those who are part of this worldwide community of the Body of Christ, the empty tomb is a signpost, a joyful statement of faith, but for others (a stumbling block to Jews and folly to first century Greeks, for example), it doesn't mean anything. For us, that early dawn is the power of darkness giving way to the dawning of light in Jesus' victory over death, but to others, it's just morning. Trying to prove the resurrection is like looking for the living among the dead. It's trying to fill the God-shaped hole in every human heart with something we can capture or define; something we can control.

If Mark had wanted to prove the Resurrection, he would not have employed the testimony of women. Women, in those days, were hardly to be believed. When Mary, Salome, and Mary appeared at the tomb with the spices they had prepared, they were,

we read, alarmed. Alarmed, I think, is putting it mildly. What they found made no sense. Where Jesus' body had been, there was no body. This was not good news, but a complete absurdity. A young man in white appears. - a sight even **more** terrifying, and says, "You will see him in Galilee, just as he said, remember?" But they didn't remember, or if they did, they were too terrified to say anything to anyone. That's the real ending of Mark. Later, though, when they had their wits about them, they spoke up.

After recovering from shock, the women went from the empty tomb to Peter and the other disciples with him and told them what they'd seen. In the book of Acts, after the Resurrection, all of a sudden Peter is on fire! He tells his hearers all about Jesus and the meaning of his life and death and resurrection, and who IS this guy? Is this the same Peter, who denied his Lord three times before the crucifixion? Yes! Yes, because Peter, too, has been resurrected into new life by the power of Jesus' resurrection. He remembered that Jesus promised forgiveness of sins and new life. That's the only difference between Peter and Judas. Judas couldn't believe that his sin was forgivable. Peter chose to remember. He opted in to the circle of hope and resurrection by remembering what Jesus had said.

What is hope? It's not something that comes out of indications that things are going well, like optimism. It doesn't come from evidence, from the situation itself, but from something outside the situation. Jesus did not raise himself. God raised him. We can't bring about resurrection in our own lives. Easter is our hope. It promises that God will do in anyone what God has done in Jesus. The resurrection of Jesus is not the end, but the beginning of other resurrections to come. If Easter were the end, then evil, and hopelessness, and despair would be things of the past, and you know that's not true. But Easter is the beginning.

If you're looking for signs of resurrection in your own life, here's a hint. If the stone is still over the tomb, you've been looking in the wrong place. "Why do you seek the living among the dead?" Are you looking to come up like Lazarus, still bound in a winding sheet, stunned and bewildered, to the life you knew before? Today everybody, and not just Brynden and Nina, who are going to be baptized, but everybody has a

chance to rise, transformed into a new existence. You can't raise yourself. But you can remember how Jesus has been raised from the dead, and let go of that heavy stone that's held from inside the tomb. Let God roll that stone away: the stone of futility, or bitterness, or resentment, or fear, hopelessness or injustice, whatever stone it is that has kept you in the tomb. Remember the story, because it is our story.

Today, all the angels of heaven rejoice, because that struggle is over.

Today, that battle is won.

Today, **our** song of triumph has begun.

Christ is risen.

Alleluia!