

Pastor Colleen's Easter Sunday Sermon
April 12, 2009

Grace, Peace and Mercy be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen

“So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.”

Well Happy Easter everyone!!

On Easter Sunday this is not the resurrection story we expect to hear.

Mark's gospel is the only one of the four Gospels that does not end with comforting stories of the resurrected Jesus' appearance in the disciples' midst.

Instead it ends with fear and terror and the women running away from the empty tomb.

Believing what we believe, we celebrate this joyous event,

But not on that early morning when it was first discovered that the stone had been rolled away.

But when you think about this scene...

Can you imagine how utterly horrified those women had to be?

For think about it, people don't come back to life after they die.

And the gospel writer Mark doesn't smooth it over or try to hide it.

And quite frankly, I like that.

Because resurrection life is scary

it is life we could never imagine,

a chance we could never have on our own,

and a blessing we could never earn.

It may sound odd to us that this Easter story ends with fear and running away

But this is where we get left this morning.

Not with joy and celebration but with fear and wondering.

And I think that is a good entry into being an Easter people.

Because too often we pass over the fear aspect of the story because we know how it ends.

But as I look at it

one of the miracles of the resurrection is that a group of terrified people found the faith to believe anyway.

You see, Easter is about finding the way to move beyond the fear of death into new life.

Face it folks, there is a lot of fear in the world right now.

The world has changed dramatically for all of us recently.

What the financial crisis will be is still unfolding.

Soldiers are deployed in harm's way.

Poverty, piracy, terrorism, injustice, crimes against humanity,

disease, famine, and criminal activity seem at least the same if not worse.

When we gather together and people share prayer concerns,

we hear concern after concern about how cancer has threatened someone's life,

accidents have propelled families into crisis,

and heart disease and strokes have taken loved ones from us.

With all of this fear surrounding us and bombarding us it is a wonder that any of us are even here this morning.

With all the things we have to be afraid of it would seem so much simpler to hide in our homes, lock the doors,

and isolate ourselves from all that we cannot control which seeks to hurt us.

With all of this fear it feels much easier to just stay huddled in that empty tomb.

Because even though it may be dark and lonely in there

at least we don't have to be out in this scary world.

At least if we're huddled in the tomb we don't have to worry about anyone besides ourselves.

we don't have to be concerned about letting anyone down, or trying anything new...

It may be dark in that tomb but in the dark no one is going to look to us for any signs of life.

We can just sit quietly... we can be safe...

But into our locked rooms this morning comes an angel with a message that is going to challenge us to leave our safe, quiet, empty tombs.

Into our tombs comes a proclamation that may draw us out of our dead lives and push us into living resurrection lives.

On this Easter morning comes the declaration,

“the risen Christ is going ahead of you to Galilee.”

The risen Christ is going ahead of you....

As we sit here on this Easter morning,

With all the fears and uncertainties of the world swirling around us...

I can think of nothing more comforting than this image of our Lord and Savior

“going on ahead of us.”

For this image reminds us all that we have a “go-ahead” God.

What Good news!!!

We have a “go-ahead” God...

Think about it...

When Moses led the people away from Pharaoh and into the wilderness,

the Lord went ahead of them--as a pillar of fire by night and smoke by day.

When the Israelites were struggling to establish their foothold in the land of Canaan,

the ark of the covenant,

God's presence in their midst,

would always go ahead of them into battle.

When the psalmists described God's ever-guiding presence,

they sang of the "mighty arm of God" that went ahead of God's people.

When God wanted to speak to the people,

a prophet was sent ahead with words of warning and comfort for all of Israel.

When the women who had witnessed Jesus' death and burial went to anoint his body with spices,
 God went ahead of them
 to roll away the stone from in front of the now empty tomb.

God has been ahead of us every step along the way since our creation.
 The Easter moment celebrates the greatest "go-ahead" action ever taken—
 Jesus Christ,
 God incarnate,
 willingly "goes ahead" of us into the future,
 even to suffering and death.

And if God goes ahead of us into pain and suffering,
 torture and death,
 then how can we doubt God will not be there ahead of us wherever life may take us?

Just as he was "going ahead" of the disciples into Galilee,
 the risen Christ will "go ahead" of us into all of the "new" situations of our lives.

He will "go ahead" of us into a new family.
 He will "go ahead" of us into a new career.
 He will "go ahead" of us into the uncertainties of cancer treatments or heart surgeries.
 He will "go ahead" of us into war
 He will "go ahead" of us into times of change and transition
 He will "go ahead" of us into new relationships.
 And he will "go ahead" of us into dying and death.

Our God will "go ahead" of us... out of the tomb and into new life.

That is what is so amazing and so comforting about this morning's gospel story.
 For there is no place we can go
 No road we can travel
 No "new thing" we can try...
 Where we won't find that God has already "gone ahead."

The risen Christ has given his disciples an order: Meet me in Galilee.
 Galilee was the site of Jesus' greatest teaching, preaching and healing,
 the place where the disciples were called together originally.
 It was the heart of his mission activity...
 And Christ's mission will continue in Galilee...
 But in order for it to continue the disciples have to free themselves from their own fears and
 come out and meet the risen Christ.

And this is our challenge this day as well.
 Resurrecting Jesus is not our job... God has taken care of that.
 Our job is to meet him.
 Our job is not to remain scared and huddled in the empty tomb

Our job is to instead step out boldly on our faith
And to take up the earthly ministry that Jesus began.

We are to travel to all the Galilees of the world and to continue the work that Jesus started.
We are to spread the good news of God's love to our families, our neighbors, our communities.
And we are to spread that good news not just in what we say but in how we live our lives.

Today, no matter what empty tomb you are finding yourself in
No matter what uncertain future you are afraid of ...
be reassured that we can step boldly forward into whatever the future holds for us because
God is in the midst of it.
God is already there...
Directing our paths...
Guiding our lives...
Offering us hope and light.

God is already there turning death into new life.

On this day, we are called to step out on faith trusting that God will lead us.
For our good news lies in the hope that Jesus has gone ahead of us into Galilee
And he is there waiting for us to arrive.
May we step boldly out of the empty tomb and into the resurrection light
And may we live as an Easter people whose lives reflect that resurrection light into all the
Galilee's of the world.
Amen

**May the peace of God which passes all human understanding, keep your hearts and your
minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen**