

THE RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD, EASTER SUNDAY: APRIL 1st 2018
St. John's Lutheran Church, Summit, NJ
"Going Ahead to Galilee" (Mark 16:1-8/Series B)

"Alleluia! Christ is risen. Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia!" How wonderful it is for us to proclaim this good news more than 2,000 years after that first resurrection day! What a lovely place in which to share it too --- in a church filled with good-looking people, beautiful flowers and stunning paraments and decorations. And the music --- truly, the music of Easter nearly takes my breath away. It's almost as if, in addition to the melodic voices here today, I can hear the heavenly chorus --- hear all the voices of those whom we have loved and lost, whether recently or in the distant past, singing in harmony around the glorious throne of God. Oh, and if you missed our fabulous Easter brunch, you missed a meal that's better than Winberie's, which is my favorite Summit brunch locale. How could we not experience the new life of Easter in such a place as this?

But the very first Easter was nothing like this. The women on that first Easter Day were dressed for a funeral, not a celebration. They weren't going to a synagogue or a church either, but to a cemetery. When I was a teenager I started my Easter Sunday at the neighborhood cemetery too. You see, the father of one of my closest high school friends was a Moravian pastor, and Moravians traditionally begin their Easter celebration with a sunrise service at a cemetery. And it was there, in a 1st century cemetery, that Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified, was raised from the dead. Mind you, nobody saw it, but that's what those first witnesses were told centuries ago, and it's still the same story today. "He is not here..."

Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome had all gone to the graveyard to anoint Jesus' body because there hadn't been time to do so before the Sabbath began on the day that he'd been crucified. Now that the Sabbath was over, they could go and take care of his corpse.

And that's what they were expecting to find in that burial ground: the dead body of their beloved friend and rabbi, Jesus.

No, this wasn't a happy occasion for those three faithful women. They were sad and anxious because they had no idea of how they were going to remove the huge stone that Joseph of Arimathea had placed in front of the tomb. Not only did they expect to anoint a dead body, but they also thought they'd have to deal with an enormous obstacle before they could even get to Jesus' body.

All they could talk about on their way to the cemetery was that great big rock. "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" they asked. "How are the three of us ever going to care for Jesus' body if we can't move that stone?" Well you can imagine their surprise when they get to the tomb and find that the stone has been rolled back. Yet they don't seem to be the least bit surprised. Who moved it?

It's a mystery for sure, but we know that God must have had something to do with it, because God is in the stone-removing business. That's the only way they could have gotten into that empty tomb. It's the only way they could have seen and heard the same Easter proclamation that you and I heard today — that the crucified One has been raised and is out doing the work he'd begun when they first met him. God had moved that stone away so that the emptiness they felt in hearts and lives could be replaced by hope, even hope that sometimes feels like fear and trembling.

When the women saw that the stone had been rolled back, they cautiously stepped inside Jesus' tomb. But when they entered, they didn't see his body at all; instead they saw a young man in a white robe, likely an angel, sitting on the right side of the place where Jesus' body had been.

Needless-to say, they were scared. I think we would have been scared too with all the strange things that were going on. For not only had the stone been rolled away, but Jesus' body was missing

and there was this angel in his tomb. Seeing their fear, the angel spoke to them and said what angels almost always say first, “Don’t be alarmed; don’t be afraid.” Then he went on: “You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.”

First the angel tries to calm their fears, then he sends them on a mission. “I know you came looking for Jesus, the crucified one, but he’s not here. Jesus isn’t here; he’s out there. Out there in the world. He’s back where he started. Back in Galilee, Galilee of the nations. He’s back where all the broken hearted and marginalized folks are; back on the streets of the city, healing and bringing hope and new life.

God moved the stone from Jesus’ tomb brothers and sisters, so he could go back to Galilee --- to Galilee of old and to all the modern-day Galilees. To places like Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, to encourage those youth and kids all over the country to keep on marching, to keep on shouting, to keep on tweeting, and to keep on speaking out against gun violence and all those death-dealing things that keep us from being the people God made us to be. He’s not here, he’s been raised! God moved the stone so Jesus could go to the city, not of the holy sacrament of love, but to Sacramento, California where the blood of yet another young Black man, Stephon Clark, was senselessly poured out, just as Jesus’ own blood had been poured out for the salvation of the whole world. He is not here, he has been raised!

But there was more to the angel’s message than a resurrection announcement. For the next thing the angel said was, “Go.” “Go, tell his disciples *and Peter* that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.” Go tell his disciples *and Peter*. I love that line.

You see, Peter was the one who said to Jesus, “Even if all the others desert you, Lord, I never will; I’ll stay by your side, Jesus.” But when the going got tough, the so-called tough Peter got going. And when he did, he remembered what Jesus said: that before the rooster crowed twice that night, he would deny Jesus three times. And that’s exactly what he did.

Go tell his disciples *and Peter*. Wasn’t Peter a disciple? Didn’t the others desert Jesus too? Still, nobody had been so adamant about how he was going to show up for Jesus than Peter was. So knowing this, and how much Peter really did love him, and how horrible he felt about himself for betraying him, Jesus made sure that Peter knew that he was loved and forgiven.

Go tell his disciples *and Peter*. In these days of social media when Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and others forms of communication make it possible to spread a message almost instantaneously around the globe, I can just imagine what the angel would say today and the kind of movement his message would start. It would be the #andPeter movement. #andPeter...

You see, Peter is all the ones who are feeling rotten about themselves and the ways they don’t show up for their families, their friends and the whole human family because they’re too scared to get involved. Peter is the one who talks a good game, but doesn’t always walk the talk. Peter is the one who loves Jesus, but who sometimes loves his or her own life more. Peter is the one who denies Jesus every time he or she refuses to speak up in the face of sexism and violence against women, or against militarism, classism, heterosexism and ageism. Peter is you and me, sisters and brothers, who have come here on this Easter morning to hear some good news about God’s plan for a new world, a new creation, a new you and a new me.

#andPeter... means that Jesus is waiting for us, waiting out in the world. He’s waiting to welcome us back into the fold; waiting with arms outstretched. And he’s hoping and praying that we’ll meet him

there. That's what the angel tells those faithful women on that first Easter Sunday — to go and tell Jesus' disciples *and Peter* to meet Jesus out in the world.

It doesn't seem like his message was very successful though does it? For as soon as he finishes speaking, the women bolt out of the tomb terrified and astonished and they don't say anything to anyone, because they're afraid." Maybe fear is a right response when we think that God is really calling us to some brave new adventure of faith. Maybe silence is the right response when we need to ponder anew what the Almighty can do. But that's the call of our baptism isn't it? To trust that even if we don't know the ventures to which God is calling us or the paths upon which we're going, that God is still there, leading and guiding us?

Isn't it to keep on risking that every day God wants to us go and to make us new in the process, no matter how old or young we are? Isn't it to keep on believing, like Liam, Grace, Jack, Lila, Jaden, Will, Sofia, and Sophie will do in just a little while, that when we come to the Lord's Table, that Jesus himself is truly present, feeding us with his love so we can be his arms and legs, and heart and head in this world?

Jesus is already out ahead of us in the world on this Resurrection Day. He's out ahead of us in Summit and South Orange, in Maplewood and Millburn, in Bloomfield and Berkeley Heights, in Westfield, Wharton and Weekhawken and in ALL the places from which we've come here this morning. And he's waiting for us to join him and to journey with him into new and abundant life. So go, sisters and brothers, go *tell* the good news and *live* the good news: "The Lord is risen. He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Rev. Gladys G. Moore