

Sermon Text for Easter Sunday April 5, 2015

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Psalm 118:1-2, Mark 16:1-8

“The shock of Easter”

Welcome back, it's nice to be together on this Easter morning, to celebrate together as a family the resurrection of Jesus Christ. If you are new here today or not a frequent attender, we are so pleased that you chose to worship with us on this day, the most important Sunday in the Christian calendar. Easter Sunday is pretty amazing isn't it? One of the appeals is its familiarity. The proclamation of Christ is Risen, He is Risen Indeed. We like to unveil the cross here every year.

This year we had our cross of shame and guilt and sin where we had each of us during lent recognize how we fall short and we wrote a sin for which we need to repent. We wrote it on that cross, that very same cross. Today, that cross has been washed clean, it is without blemish, just as this Easter Sunday our sins have been washed clean. In the resurrection of Jesus our Savior we are without blemish. So welcome, welcome to this church full of sinners, washed clean by the blood of Jesus. After this service most of us will leave and go to lunch. My brother is coming over today, he comes over every year. We all have a great time. Easter is so much fun, and it is so predictable. I love Easter because there is this increased intensity, increased excitement, people are just happier on this day.

But what we are missing today, and what we have missed since the inception of this church is that very real part of that first Easter where the shock of what took place early on Sunday morning changed the lives of those present completely. There was no pent up excitement and joy and energy to start it off. Good Friday was still very much on their minds. As those women made their way to the tomb when the sun had just crested the horizon but it was still dark, the emotion that was present more than any other was fear. And when they get to the tomb fear pervades and the sensation of shock starts to settle in.

I was going to call this sermon the shock and awe of Easter but I thought it was in bad taste, so I said it instead, still bad taste, but there was without a doubt shock and awe matched with an undeniable paralyzing fear that first Easter morning. Since it seems that nothing surprises us anymore about Easter, what we are going to find today in our Gospel reading from Mark is that the ending of Mark leaves us much more in a place of shock and fear, even bewilderment, than we are used to on an Easter Sunday morning.

This Easter, I really want all of us to have the best Easter we have ever had. One filled with joy and celebration. Yesterday we had a few shy of 100 children and so over 200 people in our fellowship hall hunting Easter Eggs, enjoying the celebration of Easter at our 4th annual hunt. What joy, today, I want us to be able to be amazed, shocked at what Jesus did for us on that Easter day. Let's read about it in Mark.

Did you hear that? Did you see how Mark ended his Gospel? If you look in your Bibles you will see that the most reliable manuscripts end in verse 8. In English we make it pretty, but the Greek ends with a dangling preposition, so that verse should read like this: "To no one anything they said: afraid they were for..." It is almost as if Mark had been dragged away from his desk while finishing this Gospel up.

Really, Mark is like every other Easter story except for the ending. Let's hear that Easter story with some of the details that Mark includes. If you remember in Mark he tells us that all of the disciples had abandoned Jesus, you remember, those 12 males, but staying close by even during the crucifixion, were the women who were witnesses to Jesus' death. They accompanied the body of Jesus to the grave and were present at his burial. This all took place on Friday. Mark is very specific that in the shock of the arrest and the torture of Jesus, all the disciples would scatter and just these women, this triumvirate of Mary's and a Salome thrown in there, would be close to Jesus during the worst of times.

So we pick up the story today, for us Easter Sunday, for them just the first day of the week. It was another Monday for them, you know how much we love Mondays, well for them, before the day started, before the week started, they had something they had to do. They had been out the evening before gathering up spices as we read in vs. 1, just so that they could go and anoint the body again, just to pay their last respects. They go out after the sun had risen, but John tells us it was still dark. Their primary concern on the way to the tomb, to the cemetery was how in the world are we going to roll the stone away from the tomb to get in? They knew nothing about the fact that Pilate had sealed the tomb which would make it impossible to get in, and then had even posted guards out in front of it just in case.

You can hear them with their heads down talking about a common, seemingly simple problem that they had to face, if they only knew what was in their future. They were not prepared for the shock of Easter that would come next. Verse 4 tells us when they looked up, see, they were walking with their heads down worried about this silly stone and how were they going to move it, when they looked up, the stone, which was huge, which was sealed, which had guards in front of it according to Matthew, had been rolled away.

The next verse their ordinary day turns into Easter morning. You see there can be nothing ordinary about Easter because it is so extraordinary. Like the women we often find ourselves with our heads down throughout our time here on earth and only periodically do we look up and allow ourselves to be shocked by the presence of God, which is what happens next for these women.

There is a man in the tomb in a white robe. Now, I thought from all those movies about the Romans everyone wore a white robe. Mark didn't tell us from his presence who he was, the other Gospels call him an angel, but it is his words which provide the first shock of Easter.

Verse 5 tells us that already the women are alarmed or filled with fear because of his presence. Then he speaks: Do not fear – Moses, do not fear, Joshua, do not fear, Abraham, do not fear, Jeremiah, do not fear, Mary and Joseph do not fear. You've heard that before right? Every single Easter account has the women who are in fear. I guess that's better than the men running away, but the women were afraid.

His words continue to alarm and provide the shock of their lives for the women. Verse 6 he states, he is risen, he tells them. And they respond: He is risen indeed. Right? No, that's us today, on this side of the resurrection. Mark still has them in shock. We can gleefully and without thinking say He has Risen indeed because we aren't where the women were at that time. Their reality has just collapsed around them. Even if he tells us this was going to happen, people just don't rise up from the dead.

The man/angel said some more words but they just wanted to get out of there as soon as possible. Verse 8 ends with: So, as a result, they fled from the tomb for terror and amazement, shock and awe had seized them. They were in the grasp of fear and as a result they said nothing to anyone because they were afraid of...

The end. There is no appearance of Jesus, although we know that happens. There is no sudden recognition of: It's the Savior in our midst and at the table. The words "left the tomb" are the same ones in Greek that we find Peter using in 14:29 where he tells Jesus even though all become deserters, leave you, I will not. The women deserted the tomb. Wait, what did that man say? Make sure you tell Peter hey for me. The one who deserted me, the one who said he wouldn't.

This is not the ending we expected. This isn't the Easter we expected. I like the Easter of Psalm 118: that's what we are used to. O Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, his steadfast love endures forever. The shock should be saved for Good Friday, not for Easter. The women never quite make it to the joy of Psalm 118.

What we should be able to say, though, on this side of Easter is why was it so shocking for them? The man in the tomb says in vs. 7 that he will be in Galilee just like he told you. All throughout Mark things happen just as Jesus had told his disciples, there should be no surprise. But it is still a surprise and a shock.

It takes time to trust someone's words especially when he is saying things that don't necessarily happen ordinarily. The disciples were probably saying once they get over their shock and Jesus was in their midst, if I had to do that over again, I probably would have done it differently. I probably would not have denied you. I would have not run from the garden, I would have not fled from the tomb. I know you warned us while you were still alive, but I still wasn't ready.

The shock of Easter pertains to us today as well. Jesus tells us if you ask, I will answer. If you knock, I will open. If you ask for healing, I will heal, if you ask for help, I will provide. The shock of Easter does pertain to us inasmuch as the women left the tomb silent. And before we criticize the disciples for their shock filled actions or the women for theirs, Mark catches us and says, wait, Jesus told you, he told us, I am going before you. I am before you, Jesus has already prepared for us fertile ground where we are commanded to work.

The ending of Mark is the way God wanted it to be, because for our Easter this year and every year the ending is up to us. How we react to the shock of the Easter message when Jesus says I am alive and I am going before you. Single mom, you are not an island raising your kid, by yourself, I am going before you, put away your fear. That's the shock of Easter. God is with you. The resurrected Jesus will not let you be alone. Teenager, wondering what purpose this life holds for you, I go before you to prepare you the way. I have given you value and purpose. That is the shock of Easter. Jesus gives you value and says I love you. This Easter claim that value and replace the fear that grips you with my life, says Jesus. You sitting in the pews with health issues that shock you with a paralyzing fear of what might come next, I go before you, I am walking the road alongside of you.

Even as we have decided that there is no room to be shocked by Easter, we still want our Savior to be present. The beauty of it is that even as the disciples, the women, and even we fail, Jesus still trusts us even on the field of defeat. That is shocking. So, the question remains for us today, will we go, as we are commanded. Mark 1:1 states: the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, Son of God. In Mark we have the beginning. But the shocking point is that there is no ending. It is up to you to write that ending, knowing that Jesus is risen and has gone before you. Amen.