

Sermon Text for April 4, 2021 – Easter Sunday

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Psalm 118:1-4, Mark 16:1-8

“The resurrection according to Mark”

He is risen! He is risen indeed! We find ourselves this Sunday in the midst of signs of hope all around us. Easter Sunday and Holy Week ought to be able to provide those signs of hope and a denunciation of fear more than any other week in the life of the calendar of the church. It was sooo, amazing yesterday to be able to be together at the Easter Egg Hunt out at the Tinney park. I got emotional seeing not only the families out there, but also our entire young adult Sunday School class, the dozen or so couples and singles back together again. It was just amazing to feel the love, the happy reunions of people who were a group that had bonded incredibly so and now for the first time in over a year were getting back together again welcoming new folks in and reliving memories.

It was also great having about 80 kids out there scarfing up Easter eggs, Amanda and Beth and their minions had worked so hard to the point where kids could get up to 40 eggs, which was plenty. Smiles abounded, you couldn't see them, but they were there. We had about two dozen helpers show up, thank you. It was great to be able to finally do a community event, we are good at community events, to start and finish it and wrap it up with a bow. Those events take a lot of work but they start and they finish, they are well defined, you work within the lines and the lines are straight, not a whole lot of grey involved in them.

Mark portrays the resurrection in a way that leaves more questions than answers. Mark ends without providing a program and a clear way forward. It's Easter Sunday, Pastor Bob, we want the resurrection story to be clear, complete and tied up in a bow. Jesus died on the cross, was buried, and on the third day rose again, just like we confess. Yes, that is all true. We want the lines to be clear and sure and straight. We things to be manageable and under our control, you know, like the resurrection, Jesus died Jesus rose again. If we have learned anything this year it is that lines are hardly ever straight. There is never black and white, almost everything is grey. Let's read Mark and see how he addresses a world and a reality that is very much like the one in which we are living.

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So you probably know that before I was born on the mission field to parents who were missionaries, the youngest of four boys, my dad was a pastor first in Delaware, in Wilmington, and then in New Jersey, Red Bank. One Easter Sunday morning before church he was being a

goof ball, it is a genetic trait that the Bronkemas have in spades, the goofball gene, and one of my brothers had one of those arrows that have the suction cup ending and he put that on his forehead and walked around it all morning long before church started. My brothers thought it was hilarious, and so did he until he got ready to go over to church, took off the suction of the arrow, and there in the middle of his forehead was a big old, bright red bullseye that didn't go away until well after the Easter services were over.

You know, Easter is supposed to go a certain way, you have plans and those plans all lean into a celebration and a certain control of your environment, until they don't go according to plan. That was not a part of the plan. We do Easter a certain way. Yesterday at the Egg Hunt people were all asking: is David going to play the bagpipes, and I said of course, what's Easter without the bagpipes? We spoke on Maundy Thursday of the traditions that are crucial and important to us and how Jesus came and took the tradition of Passover and changed it into a tradition of being a disciple of Jesus Christ necessitates a servant heart. We do Easter a certain way, it has become a tradition over these brief 10 years.

Psalms 118 contributes to the tradition of Easter as it gives us phrases of celebration and thanksgiving for the faithfulness of God. Listen to it and respond, doesn't that sound like an Easter call and response. If I were to say: He is risen, what would you respond? Exactly. We know the drill. Now, try using the words: His steadfast love endures forever. But say it like you mean it, do you believe that Jesus' steadfast love endures forever, even in the face of death, even in the face of grey and crooked lines? Say it with me: Let Israel say – His steadfast love..., Let Aaron say: His steadfast love..., Let those who fear the Lord say: His steadfast love ..., Let all the sinners in here say: His steadfast love...

If you just go one more verse in Psalm 118 you read: even out of my distress I called on the Lord. His steadfast love endures forever. This is what we have come to expect from our Savior on Easter and every day. No matter what we are facing we expect, we can count on, we can rely upon the steadfast love of the Lord to endure forever. It is not something that we can control, but it is something that is truth and that remains forever. This steadfast love of the Lord finds its culmination in the resurrection, today, Easter Sunday we see God's steadfast love. That takes us to the Gospel reading for today in Mark.

When is the ending not the end? When a dead man rises from the tomb – and when the Gospel ends in the middle of a sentence. If you pull up verse 8 in our reading you will see that in the Greek the actual translation ends with the word “gar” which in English means “for”. That is not a normal way to end either a Greek nor an English sentence. You don't end with the word

“for” because it means simply that there is more to come and you are not finished. What Mark gives us is a really fuzzy picture as the women who come to the tomb are given a very clear message and a very clear task, but they leave with no intent to fulfill anything that they are told to do. It tells us that they left the tomb saying nothing to anyone, they were afraid. This is how the Gospel ends, with a question mark to what happens next. As if we are the ones who have to provide the ending, with God’s help of course.

Now, that’s a reasonable reaction considering what they had just experienced. Don’t sit there and think that you would do anything different. Think of the story and what has just happened. In chapter 15 Jesus has died and Joseph of Arimathea has buried him in a grave, not with all the appropriate customs which were necessary, but it was close to the Sabbath so it had to be done quickly. The women after the Sabbath, probably Saturday evening, buy the necessary spices and early Sunday morning, early Sunday morning, they make their way to the tomb with their biggest concern being who is going to roll the stone away from the tomb.

Keep in mind the tomb is a cave with a stone rolled in front of the entrance, a stone that two women would not be able to roll away, so it is a legitimate concern. They look up and see the stone already rolled away, good news and bad, we don’t have to roll the stone away, but what have they done with Jesus’ body. You know in horror movies you have the protagonists go to the worst possible places and you are thinking to yourself, don’t go into the basement, or don’t hide in that closet. You know bad things are going to happen. Well, the women see the open tomb and we are probably thinking: do not go into the tomb, only bad things can happen.

They walk in the tomb and see a young man in a white robe, the white robe of a martyr, of someone who sacrificed his life for his faith, and he tells them to go and tell the disciples and Peter that Jesus was waiting for them in Galilee. Remember what the disciples and Peter had done just a few days earlier? Look at 14:50- Jesus is arrested and they all flee. Look at 14:71 – Peter denies Jesus three times. Tell those disciples, the ones who betrayed him, the ones who are hiding in a house wondering what to do next, the ones who were used to and wanted to see things in black and white and straight lines, but failed and betrayed Jesus, tell them that the steadfast love of the Lord endures forever.

Tell those disciples who have been bewildered over this past year like the rest of us that the steadfast love of the Lord endures forever. Tell the disciples who found their own families fighting against each other over this year that the steadfast love of the Lord endures forever. Tell the disciples who were disenchanted with the leadership of the church that the steadfast love of the Lord endures forever. Tell the disciples who lost loved ones over this year that the steadfast

love of the Lord endures forever. Tell those who are celebrating new life over this year that the steadfast love of the Lord endures forever. Forever I say.

They leave terrified, saying nothing to anyone. Jesus remains in control after this scene. No ending proposed by our decisions can contain him, any more than a tomb with its great stone could. As the young man said, he always goes before us. We never know where and when we shall see him, we only know we cannot escape him, because after all, his steadfast love endures forever, whether we want it to or not. It is not up to us.

This is the whole point of the ending of Mark. There is no neat bow that ties up the ending and gives us a happily ever after simply because we want it. That's not life, that is not reflective of the Christian journey we are on together. Our lives together are messy and difficult and full of hope and fear. We are promised that Jesus goes ahead of us, that we will see him. We are promised that no matter what, the steadfast love of the Lord endures forever, and that's enough hope for me and for you to carry on. Amen.