

Jeremiah 31:1-6 and Mark 16:1-8

“The day of resurrection”

When is an ending not an end? When a dead man rises from the tomb. Welcome to Easter Sunday, what a joy it is to be together in worship. We find ourselves in the throes of Spring as the change of temperatures are eliciting all sorts of changes around us from blooming trees and renewal and new life all around us. It is a good time of year to celebrate Easter and new life and new birth, and new beginnings for all of us. As we are reading through the Bible as a community together we find ourselves in Jeremiah which rarely has good news or news of restoration and hope, but today we found a few verses that speak of new things happening.

I had a chance to talk with a member of church yesterday and he asked in all seriousness, are we near the end of the world? I do firmly believe that we are one day closer today to the end of the world than we were yesterday. But world events don't dictate the end of the world, God does. Certainly what is happening in the United States or Israel don't force God's hand to declare the end of the world. I don't know if it is the end of the world, but I do know that God doesn't decide the end of the world based upon our country.

The day of resurrection in which we find ourselves today is a second chance for all of us. If we are here and we need a second chance for any reason at all, welcome, here you will find life, new life, and you will find it abundantly, regardless of what is happening in the world around us. Easter Sunday allows us to believe the impossible. It allows us to believe that the broken can be repaired, that the dead can rise to life, that those mourning will find joy again. The day of resurrection is the single most important day in the life of our Christian faith, so let's celebrate it together by reading the day of resurrection according to Mark. Let's read.

## **READ**

Mark picks upon the day of resurrection telling us what had just happened. The women are making their way to the tomb early on Sunday morning, even before the sun had risen. We are told that the Sabbath was over, which was true the evening before, and they had probably spent that evening, as Scripture tells us, shopping for spices in order to prepare Jesus' dead body for the eternal stay in the tomb. They didn't have time to do it when he died on Friday because the Sabbath had started and you could not do that kind of work on the Sabbath. So now that the Sabbath was over, it was time to prepare Jesus' body as early as possible.

We get a listing of the women who were making their way to the tomb. These are the same women who are listed as those who saw Jesus beaten and whipped in the court of Herod

and Pilate, the same women who had seen Jesus carrying his cross through the streets of Jerusalem. The same women who had seen him nailed to a cross and hung up to die. The same women who had seen Jesus die on that same cross, and brought down by Joseph of Arimathea, and placed in the tomb in a garden. No other people in Scripture had experienced what they had experienced on this faith journey, from the beginning of Jesus' arrest to his death, and now what? What are they going to experience next?

As they make their way this was supposed to be the last and final step of a long and painful process that they had been a part of every step of the way. As they make their way the biggest concern that they had, and they had probably been talking about it the entire day before, is who is going to roll the stone away from the mouth of the cave where Jesus is buried? They simply were not strong enough to do it, but they set out anyway, still concerned how they were going to remove that obstacle which seemed absolutely impossible to overcome. But they went anyway.

Those who seek Christ diligently will find obstacles removed from them in ways that exceed expectations. That is what happens when you just move forward trusting that Jesus can, he does. You see faithfulness has a way of running into surprises. The impossible happens along the road of faithfulness. Maybe some of you are here and weren't really excited to come, but you came anyway, God will meet you here, and will surprise you how he will move obstacles in your life which you think are impossible to overcome.

Sometimes in spite of our belief in God we tend to look at the world through only human eyes with God not necessarily being a factor in obstacles that we face. Who will roll the stone away? The human answer is no one ever, and so we try to make it happen our way. But God always will. The greatest obstacle to our Christian faith is not unbelief, but distraction. We are distracted by what we see around us and what we feel is happening and think that we have to be the solution to the problem. Who is going to roll the stone away for us. The human answer is no one and never. But on the day of resurrection, we get there, and the stone is already handled. That's what happened to the women this morning.

They see the stone rolled away, now the hard part is over, let's get to work. They step in and see a man in white, probably an angel, Mark doesn't say but the other Gospels do, and understandably they are afraid. As Mary says to the gardener in the other Gospel they are probably thinking, what have you done with the body? The answer comes: He is risen! He is

not here. That was not part of their game plan, it was not part of any of the scenarios that they had created in their mind simply because it was not possible.

He is Risen! The resurrection of Jesus changes everything. We have the earliest statement of faith in I Corinthians 15:3-8 where Paul tells us the foundation of our faith. Three times we see the word fear mentioned in these Scriptures. The resurrection removes all fear for it is the perfect example of perfect love that casts out all fear. It eliminates whatever fear we may of the present, we are all anxious to some degree about the here and now. It eliminates all fear that we have of the future, many of us worry about what comes next. The day of resurrection replaces fear with hope and assurance of new things to come, of a second chance.

The angel tells the women to go and tell. Our faith in Jesus only has impact if it has feet. There is always the danger that the Easter message will just get into our hearts and our minds, but stop short of getting into our feet and into our mouths. Some of you are here because someone invited you to Easter Service here at First Presbyterian. Someone followed, a disciple of Jesus, went and told you about the possibility.

I find it so ironic that we never see Jesus in Scripture in a hurry. He is always deliberate, even slow moving, and never in a rush. But here, on the day of resurrection, we see the women fleeing and in a hurry to get away from the grave. We see in another Gospel a foot race between Peter and John to see who can get to the tomb first. The Good News of the Gospel has to have feet in order for it to go and be told to those who do not know Jesus. That is what the Great Commission is all about, go out into the world and tell people about Jesus.

We hear the command of the angel and it puts the ball in our court. We have been commissioned to gather and meet, as the angel said go to Galilee where he will meet you. But then we are to go and we are sent out into all the world to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus that has life because of the day of resurrection. The temptation for a church is just to gather. How excited are you that there is coffee hour today? Everyone, after this service, come to coffee hour, let's spend time together. We love to gather together, and as we gather, who knows, maybe, just maybe, people will stumble upon us and want to gather with us.

But we are also called to send and go and preach the Gospel and tell people about Jesus, tell them that He is Risen, he is no longer here, He is Risen indeed. Easter is about the resurrection and we have the responsibility to let people know on their turf, in Galilee, about the resurrection. But the good news, as the angel stated, is that Jesus goes before us.

I want to be sure that we hear and understand the primary message of the day of resurrection today. The angel tells the women to go and tell the disciples and he picks out one disciple in particular. Who is that? Peter, that's right, it is Peter. Why do you think his name is mentioned? It is because Peter was grieving over Jesus' death and his role in Jesus' death more than anyone because of his betrayal in telling people that he did not know him. Jesus seeks us out today, on this day of resurrection, and calls our name when we are the most down and out. Peter, do you love me?

Jesus always gives us a second chance, and a third chance, get thee behind me Satan, and fourth chance, Lord I am sinking, help my unbelief. As many chances as it takes, so he gives us. Maybe you are here today thinking that you have run out of chances. Let the impossible wash over you and hear the Good News of the Gospel today, in the midst of what may feel like the world is coming to an end, or your world is coming to an end, He loves you so much that he died for you and he rose again on this day of resurrection so that you can have another chance. Take advantage of it, it's real.

Jeremiah promises restoration in our first reading this morning. In vs.3 he states: I have loved you with an everlasting love therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you. God will always be faithful to us, no matter how unfaithful we may think we have been.

Our resurrection story ends in a bit of a strange way. After all this we read that the women said nothing to anyone because they were afraid. But obviously someone said something to someone because the disciples show up in Galilee and the rest is history. It reminds me of the story of how the Grand Canyon was created, the folk lore is that a large native American dragged a club across the area. There is a geological explanation as well, but at the end of the day we can say, something happened here, when we see it. When you look at the church across the globe there is no denying that something happened here, no skeptic can deny that something has happened here. That something is the resurrection.

How often do the tombs of our lives enclose Jesus where he is just bursting to get out? Our faith is often smothered and buried. In the church our programs, our tasks, our roles, there is so much responsibility tied up with the church and its work that sometimes we bury Christ in order to carry out our task. That is not what the church ought to be, and if it is for you, I am sorry, much of that is probably my fault. The church is not just a place where you have a things

to do. Christ is buried when that happens. The church has to be a place where Christ is seen and discovered and miracles happen and he is present in the mundane and ordinary, all of that.

Sometimes theological statements have been substituted for lived experience. Jesus may be colorful in the stained glass windows, but dull and drab in our life. He has been buried in the Bible or shut up in our organizational structure. But the good news is that Jesus breaks out of every tomb we may try to create. Brothers and sisters, he is risen, he is risen indeed!