

Easter Day - Year B
April 12, 2009, 7:30 AM
The Reverend Brett P. Backus

“The Resurrection And A Challenge For Faith”

Mark 16:1-8

“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.”

This morning's message is about Faith. Its a reminder that our challenge as Disciples of Christ is to actually believe in His resurrection and the end of death as we know it. Its about our truly having faith in our hearts about that which we constantly proclaim with our mouths.

Today is a day of Good News. Its a day of great news, really. Easter day is the day that we as Christians celebrate the very miracle, the very happening which makes us who we are. We celebrate the fact that death is defeated. We celebrate the fact that our Savior died and was resurrected. We celebrate the realization that we indeed have hope and salvation in our Lord Jesus Christ. For after all, He did not abandon us. Rather, He, in dying, defeated death itself and broke the hold that the darkness previously had on this world and on our existence. Today is a day of great news.

Yet, I must admit that I have always found the celebration of Easter to be a bit strange. Now, bear with me for just a second before you call me a heretic. It seems somewhat strange in that we celebrate on this one day what we as Christians actually are year round. In other words, at times it seems to me a little backwards that on this one day a year we as Christians gather to celebrate what we should actually always be in constant celebration about. After all, we are not just resurrected people on this special day. Rather, we Christians are an Easter people, always.

The events that we commemorate today are what make us who we are for our entire spiritual lives from Baptism on. Perhaps I can illustrate what I am talking about in another way. See, in Homiletics class in seminary we clergy are normally taught in quite a strict fashion that on Easter Sunday we are only to preach the resurrection. No other type of theology or lesson should be taught. However, the irony behind this is that really all sermons and all things that we as clergy teach throughout the year are in fact the resurrection. The resurrection underlies everything for us as Christians. The danger though, is that the only day we are so open and clear about our belief in the resurrection and what it means to us is Easter Sunday.

This dilemma brings us to today's Gospel reading. You see, the Gospel according to Mark is different from the other synoptic Gospels in its account of the resurrection in that what is believed to be the original version of this Gospel ends without any evidence of Jesus after the empty tomb. The only clear messages about the resurrection given to the women who visit, and therefore Jesus' disciples, are the symbol of death's defeat as portrayed by the empty tomb, and the angel's encouraging words that Christ goes before them. Now, these in a way are of course two comforting details for the disciples, as they can be for us Christians today. However, it is important to notice how such an ending does not leave a tidy outline of evidence easily justifying one's faith in this incredible event. This ending in no way tries to convince the reader that the prophecies made by Christ about His return were fulfilled. It simply leaves us to decide on our own. It leaves us with the option of faith, and the responsibility of discipleship. The Gospel according to Mark originally ends with this verse: "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." So, the women witnessed the resurrection through the empty tomb. They were given comforting knowledge of Jesus' presence going before them from the angel, and they were told by the angel to go and deliver the news to Peter and the other disciples. However, even though the women were given this message, they told no one.

Ok, so what's the point? It seems to me that our struggle to live our daily lives consciously as a resurrected people directly ties into today's message in Mark. The author of the original Mark wants the reader, and us this morning, to focus on the responsibility of being disciples of Christ. The author highlights the fact that our discipleship is based not on evidence, but on faith. Just as the women who visited the tomb and the other disciples in Mark, we have no physical evidence of Jesus' resurrection for our own personal faith. Yet, we choose to believe and have faith in something we cannot prove and did not witness. Also, in choosing to do so, our responsibility, just as that of the women who fled His tomb, is now to believe and take comfort in the fact that Christ goes before us and especially to spread this Great news. This is the choice that the author of Mark originally left for his readers.

So, here is the point that I would like all of us to take from this morning's sermon and to take with us into the following weeks. Believe, be comforted, and do not be silent. We must recognize as Christians that belief in the Resurrection of our Savior, that miraculous and beautiful event which we celebrate today, is a choice. We choose to believe it. In choosing to believe that Jesus indeed defeated death as we know it and the hold of darkness over this world, we also can be comforted in knowing that Christ goes before us in all things. We are not alone. Most importantly, in deciding to dare to actually believe in what we celebrate this morning, we are charged as a people of faith to spread this great news, the news of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. Brothers and Sisters in Christ, I would like to invite us all to examine what it is that we are here to celebrate this morning. I would like to invite us all on this Easter morning to renew our faith in the Resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, not only for this wonderful

morning, but for all the days of our lives. Let us do this with the real and true understanding that, along with our decision to believe in this unbelievable event, this unbelievable truth, the unbelievable love of our God, comes the comfort of knowing that Christ Jesus walks with us always, and more importantly, that we as His followers are called to live out and spread through word and action the unbelievably beautiful news which we gather together to celebrate here today. He is Risen indeed! *Amen.*