

A Sermon for DaySpring
By Eric Howell
The Blinking Cursor
Mark 16
March 31, 2024 Easter

I'm so pleased to stand before you today and say happy Easter to each of you. Today is the high and holy day of days. Of course, this is not the only day of the Lord because every Sunday is a little easter, because *every* Sunday as Christians gather for worship we are remembering and celebrating the resurrection of Christ. So every Sunday is a celebration in faith, hope, and love of Jesus Christ who died and rose again for our salvation. That's true whether it's ordinary time, Advent, Christmas, or even Lent—every Sunday, indeed every day—is lived in light of the resurrection. That's not to take anything away from today—not at all—every other Sunday's joy flows from this one like a river of life.

This Sunday flows so fully, one Sunday can't contain Easter. On the church liturgical calendar, there's a whole season of Easter Sundays beginning today-- 7 weeks of Sundays. We've entered the Easter Season, which for 7 weeks bears witness to the confession that we share all year long—Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again. But there's something else, that's also true, especially about today. There may be a liturgical season of 7 easter Sundays; there may be a theological assertion that every Sunday is a resurrection celebration, but, and this is also true . . .there's only one Easter. Only one day on which the fullness of the gospel drama of crucifixion and resurrection is so richly entered and encountered when the first rays of day's light reveal a stone rolled away and a tomb mysteriously emptied of its occupant. Only one day when children come dressed early in jammies and later as "sugar confections". (Thanks to Barbara Brown Taylor). Only one day when 1700-year-old John Chrysostom is read aloud in churches all over the world. Only one day, when vigils are kept, Lenten fasts break wide open, and otherwise rational people come to church in the dark morning to stand under a tree and sing the sun's rise into the sky, and the Son of God to arise from the grave, and to remember—because we desperately need to remember--the reason for our hope and recapture the healing of our souls.

It is the one Easter—today-- that gives life and meaning to all the other Easters in our lives. Today is the day for a lump in the throat, today is the day we sing a little louder, even in the back. Today is the day we sit a little straighter. Today is the day we smile a little broader. Today is the day we say, "Death, where is your victory, death where is your sting?!" Today is the day when we exhume our hallelujahs, break open the bread, we break not the sign of the dead body of Christ, but the living Christ who broke the iron grip of death and lives now through his body, the Church.

This is the day death took a body and came upon God, the day hell was embittered, as you said. The day Christ is risen, and all are summoned to enter into the joy of the Lord, to receive this grace, rich and poor, ascetics and apathetic, saints and sinners, you that have fasted in Lent until the very last night, and you that were already sneaking Girl Scout cookies in week 1. Today the table is richly laden, the calf is fattened, and no one goes hungry. This day, for those who feel at home in a church, and those who don't think you'll darken a church door until next year, for those who feel at home in your skin, and those who don't know how you can keep moving through the world the way you are, not to mention the way things are in the world. For those whose bodies are precious but in pain, for those whose minds are full but wavering, for those whose faith is strong, but so are doubts. Today is your day.

It is “the day of the annual Easter egg hunt, the day the cooks in the congregation keep looking at their watches. It is the day everyone is supposed to be happy, lovely, and well-fed,” which is wonderful, and also, as more than one preacher has pointed out, “somewhat at odds with the gospel.” (BBT, “The Easter Sermon”, *Journal for Preachers*).

In Mark’s gospel, which is the earliest one, there are no pastels or spring lilies. There’s no words like rejoice, hallelujah, or gladness. Women in Mark’s gospel wear no lovely easter hats, but they do have the lead roles. God bless these women, courageous, brave, stalwart, faithful to the end. They are models for women, and some men, who will follow in their footsteps throughout history even until today, even where those footsteps take them into lonely and dangerous places. Their faith walks on.

On that first morning, these three women duck in the hewed-out tomb and there see a young man, an angel we suppose, sitting there in the place where they for all the world expected to see the wrapped, lifeless body of Jesus, remaining in place where they had last seen him on Friday.

The young man speaks for God. Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified. He has risen. He is not here. See the place where they laid him. The women might be excused for muttering at the mansplaining, “Where they laid him? Who are they? They all ran away. You mean, “The place where we laid him.” But they didn’t press the point.

The angel continued: “Go tell his disciples he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him.” The Gospel ends right there: “They went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had seized them and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.” Even their courage ran out. “They were afraid, and they said nothing to anyone.” Mark is even more decisive. “They said nothing to nobody.”

Grammatically, in the original Greek, Mark’s Resurrection narrative ends in a preposition. (Don’t tell 10th grade grammar teachers.) It is the Gospel’s last sentence, which means the whole book of Mark ends in a preposition, just dangling there, like a cursor blinking waiting for the next word to be written, a word which does not come, not from Mark anyway. Later on, other folks added on extra paragraphs you might see included in your Bible, but it’s been well-known since the early centuries that Mark ended in verse 8, with a grammatical gesture that something else is still coming.

Yes, something else is still coming.

For some people, though, that’s enough. It is the truest story they can hear right now, and it’s enough. And so Mark, for that reason, may just be their favorite Gospel Easter story. For some people, Easter and all the Easter-ing can be just a little too much with its trumpeting anthems that death is defeated and God has decisively won victory over death, sin, grief, and despair. That’s good news for sure but those monsters still feel all too real for some people at some points in life. The good news of the most unlikely sort is sorely needed, but don’t frost the cake just yet. What is more, in a postmodern era, it’s out of fashion to make declarations about anything having to do with mystery, faith, the unseen God, or cosmic implications of the resurrection. We’re reluctant to do that too loudly. We’re a little afraid and like the first tomb-visiting women, we often say nothing to nobody. And we end confessions of faith not with an exclamation point of assurance, but with a comma of uncertainty.

Until this point, Mark's gospel has prepared us for what we think should happen next. In Mark's telling, all through the gospel, all the action happens immediately. That's like his favorite word, immediately. He uses it more than any other book in the Bible. Immediately. Right now. And so we'd expect that as soon as the women are told to go tell Peter and the disciples to go to Galilee that they immediately did just as they were told, and that immediately, the risen Christ appeared to them, and immediately they fell down and believed, and immediately they preached the gospel, and immediately people responded and gave their lives to Christ, and immediately the church was born, and immediately the good news of Christ went throughout the whole earth, and immediately those who died were raised to glory, and every tear was wiped away from every cheek and every problem was solved, and ever glory was inhabited, and immediately, all was made right with the world, and all of it happened right now. . .

But, we're still left with a blinking cursor.

The Lord and his people in the world everywhere is Galilee, if you can hear it that way. Now the Gospel isn't just a record of what Christ did. It is a revelation of what Christ does in the world now unleashed from the tomb.

He hasn't gone back to Galilee. It would be a mistake to think this means we go back in nostalgia to a simpler time. Mark's gospel never looks back over its shoulder. It always looks forward. He has gone to Galilee. If you want to find the resurrected Jesus, he's there, now. This is Galilee, his Galilee of resurrection grace, anywhere where the sick are made well, where evil spirits are cast away, where outsiders are welcomed back in, where the lame walk, where sinners share Table, where storms are stilled, hungry people are fed, where tears are wiped away from cheeks by people who love you, where the gospel is proclaimed, and where disciples of Jesus stammer out the best confession of faith they know how "You are the Christ."

The place the risen Christ has gone is the place of human pain and need. That's where the incarnate Christ went back then. That's where the risen Christ is now. We will find him, if we seek him with all our hearts, still ministering to human hearts with compassion.

On this Easter morning, we peek over the shoulders of the women as they peek into the tomb; and with them, we receive the command, "Do not be afraid. Tell the news." He is not dead in a tomb in the ground. He is not packed away in the tomb of history. The risen Christ is alive, is here, and always, always is going ahead of us into every place in need of redemption. Go there with him.

In the days to come, keep your eyes open. May you have the grace to see him in the hands and feet and hearts of those whose lives are transformed in him. May you have the grace to see him in yourself, responding to despair with hope that holds on, to falsehood with truth that breathes fresh life, to callousness with love that knows no end, to unbelief with faith that sustains, and to all of life with a deeper trust in God your creator and your redeemer, with a peace that passes any understanding. May this be your Easter, today, and for so many days still yet to come. Amen.