

Mark 16:1-8

When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. ² And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. ³ They had been saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?” ⁴ When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. ⁵ As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. ⁶ But he said to them, “Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. ⁷ But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.” 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.”

Will you pray with me please? May the Words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts and minds be acceptable in your sight O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen

There is an ancient liturgy of the Church, which works like this: The worship leader, looking out on the people gathered for worship, proclaims:

"Christ is risen!"

And the people respond: "**He is risen indeed.**"

Let's try that together,

And so, what is there to say on this day?

Christ is risen.

"He is risen indeed."

He is risen indeed! The tomb is empty and we have gathered to celebrate that emptiness! After the darkness of the last three days we find indescribable lightness and I find that I have to ask... "now what?"

I am not asking that to be flip, I don't mean any disrespect, I am not suggesting that our celebration today in worship is without meaning. But I just wonder.... I have proclaimed: "He is risen." You have responded to this statement of faith with: **"He is risen, indeed."** And so I have to ask you, as well as myself: "now what?"

What does it mean to us that the Lord is risen? What does it mean that the tomb is empty? What does it mean... and not in some sort of encyclopedic, dictionary-definition fashion. What does it mean deep down in your heart, deep within your soul during some late night alone with your thoughts, ringing down the hallways of the place where you do your life's work, when you hear the voices of our ancestors in the faith, calling to us across the void of time with the ancient words of worship-
- "Christ is Risen! "

"He is risen indeed!"

How do you respond to that, all on your own, when there is no preacher to prompt you, no congregation to remind you of what to say and when to say it? When that call comes, daily, weekly, hourly Do you look up from whatever it is you are doing and respond?

"Christ is risen."

"He is Risen indeed."

So, what does that mean? It happened; we said it, now what!

Anyone who has experienced the loss of a loved one will understand the importance of these words written by a minister who just lost his mother:

"Until today," he writes, "Easter was the most important thing in my life."

"Today, the most important thing is the resurrection."

Suddenly, the Easter candy and pageant, the new clothes and services, the favorite hymns and ceremonies, all fade in importance. What is left is the central message of the faith.

“Christ is risen.”

“He is risen indeed.”

Mark is perhaps the most interesting and maybe the hardest of the gospels to read on Easter morning. In Mark's telling, on the third day, the women return to the tomb to finally fully prepare Jesus's body for entombment. They are greeted by a rolled stone, a man dressed in white and the words “Don't be alarmed! You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised. He isn't here. Look, here's the place where they laid him. Go, tell his disciples, especially Peter that he is going ahead of you into Galilee. You will see him there, just as he told you.” Words of assurance that assure no one, instead, the women are overcome with terror and dread and they flee and they say nothing because they are afraid.

The original writings of Mark's gospel end here. There is no meeting of the beloved teacher in the garden, no sighting of a risen Lord.

And Mark does that on purpose, he challenges us here to believe because we know, to believe because we have been walking with the teacher all of this time, to believe because we have heard the words, to believe because we know that Jesus is

the Son of God and we don't need no stinking empty tomb to prove that to us. But we must certainly look at one another and ask...Now What? The tomb is empty, Jesus is not here, now what do we do?

I have to imagine that the early church felt the same way. Traveling the Judean countryside with Jesus had its difficulties, but in retrospect, that was the easy part. Jesus was there in person walking every step of the way with them, now it appears that he is gone and the real work of his ministry is going to begin, the hard part of the job is upon them and they had to have been asking "Now what?" Now what do we do on our own, Now what do we do to carry on the teachings of the Good News? Now what does it mean to be a follower of Jesus Christ?

Easter can be difficult. I mean really, it's hard enough trying to explain Christmas isn't it? That whole virgin birth thing, mangers and shepherds and wise men and angels, God's son coming to earth not in a burst of glory but in the humble form of a baby, and NOW its Easter and we have to try to explain this whole dead and not dead thing. It's a hard story to sell sometimes isn't it? So what do we say?

I am going to say something this morning that may sound odd to you—the power of Easter is not whether you intellectually agree with the gospels. The power of Easter is not found in whether or not you think Jesus walked from the tomb. The power of Easter, the power raging through this day of celebration, throughout the history of humankind, throughout the ministry of the Church, is not the power of intellectual agreement...It is the power of the resurrection itself, present in the life of those who truly follow Christ. That's the story to tell about Easter.

Important as it is that Jesus is raised from the grave, what is more important is that Jesus is not merely resuscitated, that is, he is not restored to the same way of living he had before the crucifixion. Jesus is not resuscitated, he is resurrected.

He is raised by the power of God into a new way of life, a new existence.

The power of Easter comes as the resurrected Lord is raised to a new way of life, and then, in a miraculous fashion, shares that new way of life with us! And I feel, I truly believe that that new life has got to lead us to the question “now what?”

Luke Timothy Johnson author of *The Real Jesus* writes: "The Christian claim concerning the resurrection of Jesus is not that he picked up his old manner of life, but rather that after death he entered into an entirely new form of existence, one in which he shared the power of God and in which he shared that power with others. The resurrection experience, then, is not simply something that happened to Jesus but is equally something that happened to Jesus' followers. The sharing in Jesus' new life through the power of the Holy Spirit is an essential dimension of the resurrection."

Christ is risen; (He is risen indeed) and those of us who follow Christ, who truly give ourselves to him and seek to live as his friends and family in this world, share not only in his name but into the Life to which he is raised. This resurrection life is now our life. And we have to ask ourselves every day “Now What?”

Now What? We are an Easter people. For us to be an Easter people means that more than the day of celebration, it is the resurrection that counts. It is the daily realization that the very power of God which raised Jesus from the dead is also the very same power which flows in and through us as followers of the Risen Lord. To be an Easter people means that we know that it is not our own strength which

sustains us. It is not our own wisdom and cunning on which we must depend. It is not by our own wits and resources that we struggle to survive.

“Now what” means that when life is good, when it is full of blessings and laughter and gifts and graces we who are Easter people know how to respond.

Christ is risen

He has risen indeed!

“Now what” means that when the echo comes down the hallways of the workplace, through the silent nights of worry in hospital rooms, through the grief of funeral parlors and cemeteries; when the echoes come from all those who surround us in the great cloud of witnesses, we who are Easter people know how to respond.

"Christ is Risen.

"He is risen, indeed"

HALLEJUHA AMEN