

Sermon for Easter Day – The Resurrection of Our Lord, 16.iv.2006, 10:00 a.m.
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saint James the Apostle / Brogue, Pennsylvania
Acts 10:34-43; Psalm 118:1-2,14-24; I Corinthians 15:1-11; John 20:1-18; Mark 16:1-8
Holy Communion, LBW - Setting 2

J. J. !

Grace to you and peace from God Our Father and from Our
Risen Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ! ✠ Amen.

Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed!

Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

A blessed Easter to you!

At Easter Dawn we heard the Easter Gospel in all its quiet
and deeply personal beauty according to the Disciple whom
Jesus loved, Saint John. This Easter morning we have the
opportunity to hear, as an alternate Gospel text, the voice of
Saint Mark the Evangelist as he proclaims the Easter Gospel for

Synoptic Gospels. Listen with the ears of reason and see with the eyes of faith as Mark proclaims the Good News of the Resurrection in terms with which Christians of every age are able to identify:

16:1 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.

16:2 And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb.

16:3 They had been saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?"

16:4 When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back.

16:5 As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed.

16:6 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.

16:7 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."

16:8 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.



I have a problem this morning. For this congregation and with and on behalf of the whole Church, I am called to *speak* about something, something about of which the very first witnesses were *silent*. Every Easter, and indeed every Sunday, every 'Lord's Day' on which the Church throughout the world calls to mind and gives voice to the message of the rising of the crucified Jesus from the dead, is a day on which Christians speak, sing and pray about that which the women at the tomb did not expect, about that which terrified them into silence. That that silence was broken is obvious, but unless we understand and feel the reason for their silence, for their awe in the presence of that which they did *not* expect, we have no part in the miracle of this day, no salvation from our bondage to the known and the expected.

whom the life had been crushed by the powers that control the world, the powers of death that always win. He may have said something about rising on the third day, but young men in love say many things, and this young man had been in love with God. They loved Him even if His words made no sense, but they did not expect Him to keep the promise He had made to them.

They did not expect to see the massive stone rolled away from the tomb. They did not expect to see . . . *nothing*, in the place where they had expected to meet death

They expected what they knew: defeat of the poor and powerless, death, decay and inconsolable loss.

They expected a corpse shrouded in white linen, already beginning to decay and smell.

They did not expect a living, breathing, *speaking* young

young man wearing but a linen cloth who ran away naked from those who arrested Jesus four days before? *Was He the Risen Lord Himself* become a youth again in His glorified body? Whoever the young man was, he was not what the women expected to see and hear that first Easter morning.

And they were speechless, "for they were afraid" (?? ??????? ?? ?). But, perhaps they were not all that talkative to begin with. After all, they were women in a severely patriarchal society. In the case of Mary Magdalene, especially as we know her from the Gospel of John, that did not stop her from speaking quite freely and frankly, to Jesus at least. They were speechless because they were confronted by an event completely beyond their understanding, a situation that did not conform to their expectations about Jesus or life and death in

never mind how costly or at what risk they had brought them to the tomb. And they were now given a task they could not at first bring themselves to perform. Yet, their very silence, their very astonishment and reverence is the beginning of that task . . .

. . . as it is of ours. A telling of the miracle of Easter with the ease one might tell a child about the Easter Bunny or the Tooth Fairy is about as convincing as that. A Christian piety and a Christian proclamation that proceeds immediately and constantly to 'go and tell,' 'ot talk and talk and talk and never once to be *silent*, never once to be *astonished* never once to acknowledge the immense power and momentum of death in our world, and the absolute *contradiction* that the Resurrection is, is so much pious piffle, so much ~~use~~ claptrap and is, according to the Gospel of Mark, thoroughly unbiblical.

hour, may it please Almighty God, will end in a silence that opens itself to a peace and joy without end. Like the astonished silence of the Virgin Mother of Our Lord at the Annunciation and the Holy Nativity, Christian proclamation of the Easter miracle begins in the astonished silence of prayer, in the awe of the presence of God, and leads also to that makes way for God's Word, for the message of the Young Man dressed in white in the very place of death.

Why, then, does our congregation and our church so fear silence, filling in every gap before, during and after worship with sound or just plain noise, pushing a concept of evangelism that is all about talking, all about gimmicks and strategies for church growth? Has either our congregation or our Lutheran Church today ever thought about providing and protecting a space in

and earth within that silence as on all teaching, preaching, study and Christian speech that the faith of most of the past twenty centuries was based. From what will the faith of tomorrow grow and thrive in the face of the usual challenges of sin, death and persecution? On the basis of our ends *chatter*? It would be interesting to know from how many pulpits in Western Christianity the silent, dumbstruck witness of the women at the tomb is being proclaimed instead of the optional narrative of Mary Magdalene and the Risen Christ in John, a story full of words and action. I doubt that Mark's honest and unadorned witness is heard from many pulpits today.

If you have perhaps always found it difficult to express this central belief of the Church's faith in words, and found yourself uncomfortable around those who seem to have no such

new life in the midst of a world bent on dealing out mass death
come slowly to you, then go to the tomb of the Crucified with
the women, carrying with you your honest expectation. There
you will not stand alone. Stand there, as long as you like, as long
as you can bear it, with the women at the tomb, puzzled that
something is not quite as it should be, something you are sure
no one else will believe. Enter the tomb with them, and, instead
of speaking, listen and know the presence of the Living God.
His Word will come to you in that holy silence, and it will come
from you in His good time. ✍️ Amen.

Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed!

Now to Him Who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood, and has made of us a Kingdom, priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever ~~✠~~Amen.

