

Easter Sunday 2013
Affton Presbyterian
Easter Sunday 2019
Anaheim 1st Pres
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I Am...the Resurrection (Easter Panic)

Mark 16:1-8

How beautiful it all is here!

I love the color and the banner...the smell of the flowers.

I love the music, the songs, the joy.

Everything seems to be decked out...even some of you.

Look at your fancy clothes and clean faces.

You must have come here today expecting something special.

And you seem to have found it.

Isn't it wonderful when things go as expected?

When all the pieces fall into place

You came here today expecting a celebration...

To hear stirring music, to see beautiful flowers

And to hear a familiar story of hope. And here it all is.

But let me tell you, the first Easter was nothing like this.

There were no flowers, no music, no joy.

And nothing went according to plan.

Just as nothing had gone according to plan for what seemed like forever

Looking back, it's obvious that there were signs of the end from the very beginning

From Jesus' first sermon back in Nazareth, some loved him & some hated

There just didn't seem to be any place in between

By the time we reached Jerusalem the world seemed to be divided between
Those who were trying to understand his teaching
 & those too locked in their understanding of God, truth, world to hear
Those powerless enough to find hope in his message
 & those powerful enough to feel threatened by his actions
Those who followed Jesus and those who plotted against him

But when we arrived in Jerusalem to celebrate Passover
 It seemed as if the balance might be tipping in Jesus' favor
Perhaps all the work & travel of the last 3 years had finally payed off.
Crowds poured out to greet Jesus
 They shouted & cried, waving branches and throwing their cloaks on ground
But it turned out it wasn't really wasn't Jesus they wanted
 They wanted a rebel leader, a political liberator, someone to rescue them
And Jesus was never a rescuer...
 He healed people of disease; he opened their eyes to a new way to see;
 He gave hope and strength to survive adversity
 But he never promised to simply eliminate all the bad or hard things in life
He was teaching us to follow him through those times, not be immune from them
But the crowd didn't understand that. Who can blame them.
We had been with Jesus day in and day out & we didn't really understand
It was only after the fact that all the pieces fell into place

So, when Jesus didn't turn out to be the Messiah that the crowd wanted him to be
 It gave Jesus' enemies the opportunity that they sought.
 They turned the disappointment to anger

A mob is easy to manipulate. They are operating on emotion. They aren't rational.
So it wasn't difficult for Caiaphas & his minions to turn the crowd against Jesus.

But even worse, his own disciples failed him time & again that week
Judas was the one to actually betray him, to sell him out

But James & John spent their week bickering about who should be greater
And after boasting of his loyalty, Peter denied even knowing him
Out of the 12, only John joined us women in keeping him company at the cross

Jesus had always been there for us in so many ways.

Yet in the end, we weren't there for him.

We only stood by and helplessly watched our dreams die along with him

There on that cross

I know that we couldn't have stopped what happened from happening,

But the point is, we didn't even try.

Which is probably why it was so important to the Marys and me

To get to the tomb so early that morning after the Sabbath

We wanted to do something. We wanted balance the scales of the week before,
to show how much we had loved him, how much still loved him

We knew it was too late to bring him back, but we could at least do this

We could attend his body and say our goodbyes

So, we left the house early, before daybreak, so that the moment

the first light peaked over the horizon we would be there and ready.

On the way to the tomb, as we wound our way through the dark streets

It occurred to us that we had no idea how we would get to his body

The stone would be too big and heavy for us to move

The soldiers were unlikely to help. Could we do it? How?

Yet when we arrived we realized that we faced an even bigger problem

The stone was gone, rolled away. That worry was taken care of.

But Jesus' body was gone as well.

Even after all these years and all the time I have had to try and put pieces together

Those few minutes at the tomb remain a jumble of images and impressions

There was this young man in dazzling white. I don't know who he was.

Maybe he was an angel. Maybe not.

But whoever he was, he had this strange message for us...

"Don't be afraid. You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified.

He is not here. He has been raised.

Go, tell the disciples & Peter: Jesus has gone ahead of you to Galilee

And there you will see him."

Don't be afraid?

Jesus has been raised?

Go and tell the others?

You will see him in Galilee?

Well, it was all simply too much.

I know that it doesn't make a very good story.

And that you, who have known the story so long & well probably can't imagine

Why we reacted the way we did

Why we didn't hug each other and laugh and celebrate at the joyful news

The truth is, I'm not even sure how much of it we heard
We had lived through the darkest, most horrible time any of us could imagine
After the nightmare weekend we had just endured.

After the ugliness of the mob, The viciousness of his guards,
after the violence of his death...it was all just too much
So we didn't do anything that the messenger said
We didn't calm down, but gave ourselves over to fear and hysteria
We didn't listen to or pass on the message...at least not at first.
We simply fell apart. We panicked. We ran.

I have worked hard over the years to understand why we did what we did
And to forgive myself for not embracing the wonder and the miracle
After all, he had talked about his resurrection to us. He has tried to prepare us.
We had even seen a hint of it when he called Lazarus out from the tomb
When he flat out told us that he was the resurrection and the life
But we just didn't get it. Why is that?

Here is the best understanding I have come up with:
Everything that week had been increasingly horrible and terrifying.
Things had progressively gone from bad to worse.
But at least everything had followed an understandable, logical course
Enemies conspired, politicians bowed to pressure, a mob turned ugly
A prisoner was tortured, mocked and then executed.
The fact that the prisoner was our Lord and teacher and friend
Made it torture for us as well
But as horrifying as it all was, it made a certain kind of sense.
It fit into the way we understood the world to work.

We knew the score. We understood the rules.

We had hoped for a different ending. But this is the one we had.

Jesus was dead. He was laid in the tomb. That was the end to the story.

And we had experienced death before and knew what to do next.

Prepare the body. Mourn. Remember.

And somehow move on into a world where he's no longer a part of our daily lives.

That was what we knew and that is what we prepared ourselves to do

But what happened that morning didn't follow any of the rules.

Or perhaps to put it more accurately it created a whole new set of rules

The old rules that told us that we were on our own in life

That when something died it was gone forever

That there are endings and that they are final

But when Jesus rose from the dead those rules changed

And that can be a frightening thing

Even when what replaces them is something as wonderful as resurrection

That is the promise and challenge of this day. The new rules are now new life.

On what you call Good Friday, Jesus died

But on Easter what died was despair

And a whole new way of living was born.

We found ourselves in a world where what is dead doesn't stay buried.

A world where no matter where we go or what happens

Jesus is already present in the moment

For it all happened just as the messenger said. He was raised & did go ahead.

We met him in Galilee as we prayed in the upper room & in the boats as we fished

We met him on the road to Emmaus & he joined us for breakfast at the seashore

Wherever we were, Jesus was there to meet us.

So is it any wonder then that among the earliest followers of Jesus

This became our greeting?

We would meet one another and proclaim Christ is risen

(He is risen indeed)

We did that to remind ourselves that no matter how hard life got

We were not alone. Wherever we went Jesus was already there.

We did it to remind ourselves that no matter how trapped we felt

No matter how deep our trouble, no matter how sealed the tombs/lives

The rules had changed. Death was ended. Jesus was alive.

We did it as a way to remember that in those moments when it feels as if

all hope is past, all life defeated, all faith dead

God still has something more to say. God still has something more to do.

Death is not longer an end, so nothing can be assumed.

So in the midst of banners and lilies and music, we rejoice

Yes, we fear & question, we are often confused & we wonder...

But we rejoice nonetheless.

For the message is clear.

The rules have changed. The promise is sure. The future is open.

For Christ is risen...He is risen indeed.