“April Fools”

Easter Sunday, April 1, 2018, Year B

Mark 16:1-20

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***16****When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus’ body.****2****Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb****3****and they asked each other, “Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?”*

***4****But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away.****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****“Don’t be alarmed,” he said. “You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him.****7****But go, tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.’”*

***8****Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.*

*(The original manuscript of Mark’s gospel ended here.)*

There must be some mistake. It is not Jesus sitting on that rock, but an unknown young man dressed in a white robe. This is not the person the two Marys and Salome expected to see. They expected to see the stone blocking the opening to Jesus’ tomb. They expected to have to get some help to roll the heavy stone away for them. But they see someone has done the work already; someone has rolled the stone away from the opening. We don’t know how long they whispered to one another, *Should we go in? Should we call for help? Maybe one of us should go in just to check. Two of us should maybe stay back in case we have to run. No, it’s best if we stick together. Three together are stronger than one alone.*

And so they approach the open mouth of the tomb dug into the rock. And they duck their heads and go in. And there is that strange young man in the white robe, and, as if they needed any more shocks that morning, he makes an announcement:

*“Don’t be alarmed,” he said. “You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him.****7****But go, tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.’”*

And, like any of us might have done, the two Marys and Salome beat feet and run out of there as fast as they can. And they tell no one because this vison cannot be real - no one would believe their foolish story.

In a way, today being April Fool’s Day is perfect for the Easter morning story of the resurrection of Jesus. Who would have believed it? Certainly not his own disciples! Sure, he told them many, many times he would die and then be raised up, living again, by the power of God. But, really, who believed him? When he started up with that foolish story again, they either left his circle, or humored him, or just changed the subject when he brought it up.

Playing practical jokes and telling tall tales are long-practiced traditions of April Fool’s Day. “Some historians believe the April Fools' customs began in France, although no one knows for sure. It may stem from a calendar change in 16th century France -- the moving of [New Year's Day](http://www.cnn.com/2013/09/12/world/new-years-fast-facts/index.html) from April 1 to January 1 when the Gregorian calendar was adopted. People who continued to celebrate New Year's Day on April 1st rather than the new date of January 1st were referred to as "April fools" and others played tricks on them.” (CNN)

“In France, April 1st is called ‘Poisson d'Avril.’ French children fool their friends by taping a paper fish to their friends' backs. When the ‘young fool’ discovers this trick, the prankster yells ‘Poisson d'Avril!’" (CNN)

Paper fish are very appropriate for this special day in the Christian year. The fish has been a Christian symbol since the very early days of the Jesus movement. In those early days, and really on through all the centuries of Christian development, there were and still are voices who dispute the idea of the resurrection, that any dead human body could come alive again. They say the disciples imagined the whole thing in a sort of mass hysteria moment, or that they stole Jesus’ body from the tomb and hid it, to make it just look like he rose from the dead. The resurrection story was looked at by some as a scandal and by others as just a really macabre joke.

But the scandal was not really Jesus’ resurrection; the scandal was Jesus himself (Myers). Jesus declared he was anointed by God to bring good news to the poor. He chose disciples from the working class, not seasoned religious insiders. He ate meals with outcasts – the poor, the disabled, tax collectors, and prostitutes. He healed people of their infirmities – the deaf, the blind, and the possessed. He even brought back to life three people who had died – a mother’s son, a father’s young daughter, and his own best friend, Lazarus. To his enemies, Jesus was either a really good traveling magician or a walking scandal.

The stories of what Jesus did - and didn’t do - spread around Palestine like wildfire, fueling the imaginations of those who longed to hear a word of hope. But his words also caught the ears of the religious authorities who dismissed them and called them foolishness.

The true scandal of resurrection was not the one-time event we celebrate on Easter. The true scandal was the resurrection of people’s spirits that had been going on the whole time Jesus was traveling and preaching God’s good news. He gave people hope. He listened to them and forgave their sins. He told them the kingdom of heaven had arrived; they need not wait to die to see it. *He said heaven was happening right now, right there, in their very own lives.*

And so it is with Easter. Easter happened. *And Easter is still happening right here, right now.*  Easter is all about resurrection. Every time we quit drinking and sober up, Easter happens. Every time we start speaking again to a person we have ostracized for years, Easter happens. Every time we forgive someone who’s wronged us, Easter happens. Every time we start the present day with positive thoughts instead of rehashing the hurts of yesterday, Easter happens. Every time we’ve resisted the temptation to judge and we reach across the aisle, Easter happens.

But just in case we need to have an Easter story that ends on a more convincing and uplifting note, there is an alternate ending to the Gospel of Mark. Some people in the early church didn’t like Mark’s foolish ending, the version that has the women running from the empty tomb and not telling anybody about it. So verses were added some years later to tie the story up in a much clearer way.

***9****When Jesus rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had driven seven demons.****10****She went and told those who had been with him and who were mourning and weeping.****11****When they heard that Jesus was alive and that she had seen him, they did not believe it.*

*12 Afterward Jesus appeared in a different form to two of them while they were walking in the country. 13 These returned and reported it to the rest; but they did not believe them either.*

*14 Later Jesus appeared to the Eleven as they were eating; he rebuked them for their lack of faith and their stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen him after he had risen.* ***15****He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.****16 19****After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God.****20****Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it.*

Now that’s more like it. Now here is a solid miracle, not an April Fool’s joke. Here’s a story we can follow. Here is a divine-human Messiah we can believe in. He comes back into the world, walking, talking, and calling the disciples on the carpet, just like he did in real life. He commands them to, *“Go* *into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.”* And even God makes an appearance as Jesus is taken up into heaven to sit with God forever.

But Jesus has never left us. His spirit continues to work through us to bring about heaven on earth. His legacy urges us to keep Easter in our hearts all year long. No more talk about scandal and foolishness. Jesus’ message for us is rock-solid, *“Go* *into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.”*

So we have our marching orders. We know what we must do. On this joyous Easter morning, we have the chance to not only tell the world, but show the world, the true essence of resurrection. The evidence we can use will, hopefully, be our very own lives. Instead of shouting, “April Fool’s!” we will instead proclaim, “April Facts: Jesus lives and so do we!” And that is no joke. Thanks be to our amazing Easter God. Amen.

References

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