

Return From Exile: Welcome Home

Mark 16:1-8

(This sermon is a slightly revised version of the sermon by Rev. Jeff Pulse in the CPH Lenten series for 2018, Return From Exile)

So, what are you looking for? Yes, you heard me correctly; what are you looking for? Why have you come here today? Why this place, this day? What are you looking for?

You must be seeking something in particular on a day like today because, as any pastor can tell you, no church gets these kinds of crowds every Sunday! I suppose some of you are here because it is the traditional, it is the expected thing to do on Easter Sunday: “My parents always made sure we were in church on Easter, and I am carrying on the tradition.” Maybe your family has a rule, a mandate: no church, no ham!

Some of you are here because you are always here, every Sunday. So, today is no different, except for the breakfast. But, why are you really here? What are you really looking for? You are looking for the end of the journey; you are looking for home.

Maybe you are here because you are home for the holiday and your family always goes to church together on Easter. Maybe you are here because you are unable to be home, and church on Easter Sunday reminds you of your home and family. Maybe this church and these people here are your home and family.

There is something about this day and this place that reminds us of home—and rightly so!

The unfortunate truth remains, however, that we spend most of our days looking for home elsewhere. I am not talking about our church attendance, even though it is related. I am referring to our focus upon the things of the world.

We look around us, we look to these things of the world as if they are what truly matter. We look to this world as if it truly is our home. And while that may seem like a small matter on the surface, in reality it means that we are like the women in our Easter text for today from the Gospel of St. Mark. The first place we “go” to seek Jesus is a tomb. We look for Him among the dead.

Too often, we focus upon the tangibles, the disposables, the perishable, and the mortal. We seek Jesus among the dead! We treat the pit of the tomb as if it were home.

Why would the women go to the graveyard to see Jesus? Oh, I know; we always talk about how they were doing their duty by going out to anoint the body—to properly prepare His body for burial. We speak of their bravery while the rest of the crew hid behind locked doors in fear and terror. We talk of their devotion to the Son of God.

But this one, sole truth remains the same: *they believed Jesus to be dead*. They went to the tomb to see Jesus because the tomb *is the home for dead people*.

Why did they seek Jesus among the dead? Because death is the land of exile for mankind. Sin has made it so. Death is the reality we all face. Yes, it is true that we fight it, we deny it, we do all we can to put it off; but the reality of our sin is death.

Death is our land of exile; the grave is our wilderness home. You can eat healthily, work out, see the best doctors, eliminate stress, and be in touch with your inner self; yet you will still die.

Such is the devastation wrought by sin in our world and in our beings. In the Garden of Eden, man willingly brought sin into our world; but who knew that sin would bring its partner—death. This is not the sanitized death

of our American culture! It is not simply separation of our soul from our bodies, or the just that a person's life ends.

Death is the brutal, agonizing, weeping-and-gnashing-of-teeth kind of death that is the result of being separated from God. Death that is everlasting condemnation; death that is suffering beyond comparison; death that is the great enemy that no man can overcome. Death is eternal separation from God as a result of sin.

Our sin has sent us to this land of exile, this land of death. We are in an exile that is a death both physical and spiritual; we are in exile with no ability to escape and no hope of return. Small wonder that we live as if the tomb is our home.

For this reason, God sent His Son into this world. Jesus came to rescue us from our land of wandering, from our deadly exile, from the reality of death itself. This is the exile from which Christ has freed us and brought us out. Jesus came to accomplish what we had no hope of accomplishing.

By the cross, He has redeemed, restored, and renewed. Jesus overcame the twin forces of sin and death. Jesus hung on the cross to bear our sin—suffering, bleeding holy blood, and dying as the all-availing sacrifice. He conquered Satan as He provided the sacrifice required and cleansed us from all guilt and shame.

For this, God sent His Son; for this, Jesus faced death in our place and finished the work God promised He would do; and for this, He was laid in a tomb as a lifeless corpse—but a lifeless corpse with a promise!

The women who went to the tomb that first Easter morning were not focused on the promise. They were focused on the corpse. They went to see Jesus among the dead. They were living as if the grave was their home—that is, believing that the grave is the end of their journey. But the angel told them, “Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; He is not here.”

Why do you seek the living among the dead? Why do you seek Jesus in a tomb? He is not here. He is risen!

The tomb was empty! It was not Christ's home. Only for three short days did the grave hold Him. The grave—the pit—was not and would not be His dwelling place. The land of the exile with sin and death, Satan's wilderness, could not contain Him. He is not there. He is risen!

Do you realize what this means? Seriously, do you truly understand? If the tomb is not Christ's home, then the tomb is not our home either! Christ has been victorious over sin, death, and the devil, and He has shared His victory with us.

Christ paid the price and overcame the Ancient Foe, and we are rescued from the wilderness; we are restored to our God; we are returned from the land of our exile. Welcome home!

The tomb is empty. It is no longer our focus because it is no longer our home. We no longer live our lives fatalistically. We no longer wander through this world with the attitude that we just plug along until we die. We no longer live as those exiled in a land of suffering and death.

The tomb is empty! People, **THE... TOMB... IS... EMPTY!** We do not seek Jesus among the dead, nor do we live our lives as those who have no hope. The tomb is empty! He is risen, and so also shall we rise!

This world is confusing. This world is uncomfortable and difficult. This world is heavy and overwhelming. This world still seeks our attention and our citizenship. But this world **is NOT** our home. Christ has risen!

The tomb is empty, and we live our lives as the children of God walking through this strange land. We are the **living** children of God on a journey through this world. We focus not to the right or to the left; we are not

distracted by the glamour, the glitter, the glory of this world; nor are we overcome by the pain and the darkness of it. We walk with eyes focused, not on the tomb, but on Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:1–3), the One who has returned us to a right relationship with our Father in heaven.

We walk with eyes focused not on the land of death, but on the open gates of everlasting life!

Welcome home! These are the beautiful words I am privileged to speak to you this day. Welcome home! The tomb of Christ is empty—He is not there; He is risen. And we, too, shall rise! Welcome home! In Jesus' name. Amen.