



Pastor Gwen's Sermon
Easter Sunday
"What an Ending?"
Sunday, March 31, 2024

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. AMEN!

Our Gospel reading this morning is an interesting one in and of itself. But first I want to start with a story I read this week told by Rev Amy Butler.

Once upon a time, there was a composer who created music on his piano. He worked late into the night on his compositions. Every night he was compelled to work until he could come to a logical stopping place, like the end of a movement or the conclusion of a creation. Often times that led him to work the whole night and then he would sleep well into the next day.

And guess what? It drove his wife completely crazy. She would have much rather had him on the same sleep schedule as the rest of the family to help with the children, do errands and chores around the house.

But this man, this musician seemed hard-wired to maintain this sleeping pattern, no matter what. He just could not comply to his wife's pleas, go figure. And believe me, she tried everything from alarm clocks to letting the children run loose in his bedroom. Nothing she tried seemed to make any difference.

However, one day as she was slugging a full laundry basket through the living room, she glanced at the piano. Seeing pencils strewn around among unfinished work, she noticed off to the side a piece of music and suddenly had a thought. Putting down her basket she sat at the piano and started to play the music. She played and played and played until the very last note and stopped just short of finishing. And went back to her laundry.

Sure enough a few minutes later she heard her husband clomping down the stairs, rushing to the piano and triumphantly playing that last note. He didn't sleep until the composition was finished. And from that day forward, before she began her morning chores, the composer's wife would pull the bench up to the piano and play for a while, just enough to perk his sleeping ears up and then she'd get up from the piano without playing that final note. Problem solved.

Why would Mark write such a compelling account of the life and ministry of Jesus and leave the ending of his mission on earth hanging? Why wouldn't he write about a few resurrection appearances of Jesus to his faithful followers? Why oh why would he not include this proof, proof that the Messiah had raised from the dead?

Well, the resurrection of Jesus is not easy to understand even with the whole story of the disciples seeing Jesus alive after his death. Remember our friend Thomas, Doubting Thomas who questions whether this thing could really happen or not? He had to see for himself. And I too think that we all need help in believing that this man Jesus died on the cross, crucified. And then He was laid in a tomb sealed by a big rock that had been rolled away when the women came to prepare his body with spices and oils. Mark, what were you thinking to leave things right there? Why did you not help us Mark, to understand because it is just so unbelievable? And so today, we question why we have this particular reading on the most triumphant day of our faith. This is the day that we have come to embrace as God's divine conquest over death and the grave. Maybe just maybe, Mark intended to end his Gospel account here?

I believe that Mark knew that it was not the end of the story. Maybe he wanted us to finish the story. Maybe he wanted us to understand that Jesus is in fact who he said he was by allowing Him into our lives. We are compelled to finish the story ourselves.

The resurrection of Jesus is the cornerstone of our faith. It is what separates us from all the other religions of the world. It is what gives us purpose and direction when we are perplexed, confidence when the storms of life threaten to overpower us, and hope when all seems to be lost. And so, we believe that Christ was raised from the dead by God, the Father and we are invited to experience the promise of new life in his name. We are going to have to finish Mark's Gospel ourselves.

Today, as you leave communion you are welcome to take a purple scroll with you to meditate on its words and the resurrection this week and beyond. What difference does the resurrection make in your life today? It just might be one of the questions on the scrolls, because it is an important question, we need to find the answer for. What difference does the risen Christ make in your life? Easter is not about lilies around the altar, or about eating ham or dying hard boiled eggs. It is not even about the beautiful music you hear here this morning. I would rather suspect that you are here today to let the resurrection sink into your heart and take root in your soul. Has the resurrection taken hold of your life so that all you say and do are transformed to be more like Jesus? Yummmmmmm. . .

And so why are you here today? I can tell you why we are **not** here. We are not here to just recount the post resurrection appearances by Jesus. We are not here to expect Jesus to physically stand among us this morning. We are not here to hear about archeological evidence of the resurrection. We are rather here because we are human. We want and need hope for our lives. We are here to hear that we need to finish this story that ends Mark's Gospel. In the company of other believers, we need God to enter our lives and transform them, giving us new life in a relationship with God.

And folks the resurrection does all that and more. No longer do we have to stand by and look at the empty tomb with defeat and fear. We have seen the resurrected Christ in the lives of those around us and in our own lives as we live out God's final covenant. Remember all during Lent we talked about covenants and how some are two sided and some are one sided. Well, folks, this is the greatest of all covenants or promises of God. God sent his only Son to die a criminals death on the cross, to be buried and resurrected, showing us the power God has over death itself. Our gracious and amazing gifts of forgiveness, abundant and eternal life are God's final word to us in His Son, Jesus Christ. These gifts come to us as the result of what Jesus did on the cross and there is nothing

that we can do to earn such a loving gift. And so, don't we all want to look forward to that very gracious one-sided promise?

On the ELCA website there is posted an Easter Message by our presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton. In her message she talks about the three words that jump out at her in this Gospel reading for today. First is "fear" or in the Greek, Phobos, which is where we got our word phobia from. The women were afraid of what they had seen and heard from the man dressed in white in the empty tomb. The second word was "amazement" from which the Greek gives us the word ecstasy. The third word was "seized" by the terror they experienced. They were possessed with feelings they could not explain, spirit possessed if you will. And for the women it seemed that through it all nothing had changed, except that Jesus was gone.

Folks, seeing, hearing, and believing that the tomb was empty changed everything. Our fear turns to trembling in the presence of God who raised His Son from the dead. We are filled with AWE as we stand on the other side of the resurrection. Our amazement of the grandeur of the resurrection comes in our experiencing our life post-resurrection in a new life Jesus gives us. We are given the most gracious gifts and can see them manifest in each other and ourselves. And yes, we are seized or possessed by the Holy Spirit beginning at our baptism when we died to death and were raised to new life just as Jesus did, by those powerful words spoken over the waters.

We truly, are in a different place today, post resurrection, as is all of creation. Even when the world seems to want us to go a different way and we get momentarily confused about the resurrection covenant, the Holy Spirit is there to give us the power to go on, on to the new life of forgiveness and abundant life here on earth, with the promise of eternal life to come in heaven one day with our Lord and Savior.

And so, this morning as we all tremble in awe at the presence of God around us, let us all be seized with the glory of the One who makes everything new, through His resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ. Fill us with amazement Lord so we can write our stories in response to this amazing covenant until we too play that final note in our hearts. AMEN and Happy Easter.

Christ is Risen... . . . He is Risen Indeed!
Alleluia!