

Sunday Sermon
April 1, 2018
Mark 16:1-8
“Christ Is Risen . . . No Fooling”

Introduction

“They fled from the tomb and said nothing to anyone.” The tomb was empty; the women could not understand what had happened.

The early church struggled with this abrupt ending to Mark’s gospel, with the three women fleeing speechless from the tomb. Maybe Mark was interrupted and did not get to finish his writing. Maybe the rest of the story got lost. So the church added verses to the end of the chapter. That is why those sections are in brackets in most Bibles, the shorter ending, the longer ending. The only narrative in the Bible where you get to choose the ending.

But I do not think there were lost verses. I think Mark intended the story to end that way, because he knew how difficult it is for us to comprehend resurrection.

The Rev. Jerry Herships is pastor of After Hours Church in Denver, Colorado, and a former stand-up comedian. God certainly has a sense of humor, Herships says, Easter is on April Fool’s Day this year. As if the resurrection is not already hard enough for us to present. This makes us picture Jesus coming back saying, ‘No, guys. I’m not kidding. It’s me. I’m back. Fooled death, didn’t I.’

I

The women fled from the tomb that first Easter because they were not sure what had happened. On this Easter morning almost 2,000 years later, we still are not sure what happened.

Some people refuse to believe the Easter resurrection story because it cannot be explained physically. When people die they are stay dead. When we bury bodies, they do not get up and walk away. That is the way it is.

Some people want physical proof. They do historical and archeological research trying to find the lost tomb of Jesus.

Then others develop theories to explain the resurrection. There is the swoon theory where people argue that Jesus only appeared to be dead but was later revived in the coolness of the tomb. There is the hoax theory where people argue the disciples stole the body and then lied about the resurrection. There is the substitution theory where people argue that someone else died in Jesus' place. There are all kinds of theories. I think God must smile at our theories and arguments.

II

Nowhere in the New Testament do we find an account of someone coming to faith in the risen Lord based on an empty tomb. The proof of the resurrection is not the absence of Jesus' body from the tomb; it is the presence of Jesus to his followers.

The Easter story is not a scientific documentary. It is a faith story, a miracle story, of how one man, Jesus Christ, overcame death. Just exactly how it happened is a mystery that will never be explained this side of the grave, not even on the Discovery Channel.

But I can tell you this: The lost tomb of Jesus, wherever it is, did not contain Jesus only. No, that tomb was packed, filled with all of creation, including each one of us, bursting forth to new life on Easter morning. You see, it was not just Jesus who died and was raised on the first Easter morning. Through him, we died and were raised too.

III

During Lent we have used symbols of caterpillars, cocoons, and butterflies to help us comprehend resurrection to new life. We thank all who participated, sharing caterpillar prayers of confession, cocoon prayers of supplication, and butterfly prayers of thanks.

As part of the project I decided to order some caterpillars so we could watch them go through the transforming process to butterflies. I had done this before. The other time the process moved quickly with caterpillars growing and changing to chrysalides quicker than the instructions said. I ended up with children of the church releasing butterflies a week and a half before Easter.

This time I waited longer to order. Only these caterpillars were in no hurry. They took twice as long as the instructions said to change into chrysalides.

"I do not think we are going to have butterflies for Easter," I said to Rick Leissner this week as we stood looking at the motionless cocoons in the container in my office. "Well, you know," Rick said, "Easter is April Fools Day." And he was right. I came in this morning to find two butterflies. No fooling.

So what did you expect when you came to Easter worship this first day of April? Perhaps you expected to pay your respects to a man who had died. Well, he is not here. No fooling. He is risen and has gone ahead of you, just as he said.

And Jesus is going to continue going ahead of you and doing things in your life beyond your wildest expectations. This is a Savior who will not stay dead, will not stay out of your life, even if you try to seal him in a tomb and post a guard at the entrance.

"Really," Pastor Herships says, "every Easter is April Fool's Day. From Friday to Sunday morning, the whole world, all of humanity, thought that hope and

love were dead.” But God came back, keeps coming back, having the last laugh over death and suffering.

Conclusion

We may not be able to explain resurrection, but we can see it:
in the experience of forgiveness,
in the renewal of love,
in the rebirth of hope,
in the triumph over those things in life that would rob us of
meaning and joy.
and in release from fear in both life and death.

We may not be sure how the resurrection happened, but we are
sure we serve a risen Savior.

So all over the world today, April 1, pastors and priests are standing in front of congregations in great cathedrals, in little country churches, in city storefront churches, in military base chapels, in house churches meeting in secret, in open stadiums, and in cemeteries, and they saying the words, “Christ is risen!” And even if they may not understand how the resurrection happened, the people in all those places are responding in faith, “Christ is risen indeed!”

So now I am going to ask you again to make that confession.

I say the words, and I ask you to respond believing:

Christ is risen!

Christ is risen indeed!

Alleluia.