

The Sun Rises

That the World Might be Saved

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Mark 16:1-8

One Sunday, a little girl stays with a neighbor in the morning because she is sick, while the rest of her family heads off to worship. It is Palm Sunday, so when the family returns, each is carrying a palm leaf. The girl asks, "What are those for?" and her mother replies, "People held them over Jesus' head as he walked by." "Wouldn't you know it," the girl says, "The one Sunday I don't go, Jesus shows up!"

It's one week after Palm Sunday. Here we are on Easter Sunday, the day of resurrection. And Jesus isn't showing up. Again. He only leaves a messenger to say, "Meet me where we did the good stuff." No attendance stars for him!

Our celebration of Easter isn't about what the disciples experienced on that first morning. Our celebration has the benefit of hindsight, of having the long experience of the Jesus movement through its various incarnations: first worshipping with their Jewish brothers and sisters in the synagogues, also home churches, later, after the break with the Jews, worshipping in catacombs underground to avoid the Roman authorities, followed later by gothic cathedrals supported by government taxes to declare the son of God on earth, to outlaw movements like the Quakers, and the church today, with every flavor imaginable in Asia, South America, North America, Europe, Oceania and Africa.

It's takes a lot of imagination to go back into that first Easter morning, when the women came to do what women did then -- the careful, respectful tending of Jesus' body after his death.

And things went awry, not just for the women on that day, but also for us as readers. Mark's gospel, as far as we can tell, originally ends right where we left off, with the women frightened and scared by their experience of the

open tomb. They are wondering what they have heard, and they've been given a couple of messages to deliver "to the disciples"- and almost as an afterthought, "Peter too" (the one disciple who explicitly denied Peter and was perhaps ostracized by the others for it?).

This story ends without ending. The gospel leaves us hanging – and imagining, how did we get from there – that first Easter day – to here?

Meaning not History.

That's when we really get to delve into the message of Easter. If there is one thing that I would you to walk away with this Easter day it is this: Easter is an invitation to reach for resurrection!

If you really want to know about Easter, it will not be in tuning into a version of CSI Jerusalem and trying to figure out which particular one of the four gospel stories gets the resurrection stories "right." It won't be totally focused on whether there was a physical resurrection of Jesus' body that the disciples see as your one and only basis of whether the Jesus enterprise that we now call Christianity is something worth committing to. It will not get stuck on a day only to miss the whole journey of Jesus' life and the result that it had for the world.

If you really want to know about Easter, it's about joining the journey. Just as those first disciples were invited to journey fter his resurrection, so we too are invited. We are invited as children of God, as the beloved ones, we are invited across ethnic groups, racial categories, economic status, geographic location, across ages, marital status and gender preferences. We are all invited. All means All.

What is this invitation to?

It is simple: it is an invitation to life, *your new life*.

See, when those disciples left Jerusalem after the gospel story ends to meet Jesus in Galilee, here was their invitation: Jesus invites them to start the journey *again*, back in Galilee where all things were possible, where the sick were healed because friends brought them, to new gatherings of people disempowered by the powers that be, to people crossing boundaries and

never looking back on the old ways that kept them afraid of people who were not like themselves, but instead living with love and zeal, finding support in true community that changed themselves, and therefore changed those around them.

Easter is an invitation to your new life – a life bigger and with more meaning. It's a life dedicated to the mission of God.

20th Century theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote from his prison during World War II, "Jesus does not call men to a new religion, but to life."

Our invitation is the same today: not to live into a dogmatic set of beliefs, but to live in a new way that offers up bounty that cannot be counted in the GDP, won't show up in our bank accounts, and isn't going to require any extra forms to be submitted to the IRS for our tax returns.

This kind of living embodies itself in the rhythms of the earth and seasons, as incarnational beings on earth; this kind of living allows us to experience

the love of God that Jesus expressed,
the community that he fostered,
and a life of meaning beyond the everyday worries and concerns.

The world is in deep need of this today. Author Diana Butler Bass, who believes we are in a time of religious reimagining in our Christian tradition, another spiritual Great Awakening you might say, thinks we are in need of "romantic realism," in which we are called, as institutions crumble around us, to gather ourselves together, with spiritual resilience, and to go out on a journey, much like that of those first disciples, to risk with faith, that God walks with us.

Today more than ever, Easter is an invitation to your new life.

Today we are finding new spiritual life in the ways we've learned since the pandemic began – with a recorded service from here in the Sanctuary, and a parking lot service to gather in a socially distanced way in real life. They are

not what we imagined, but we are reaching folks that haven't otherwise participated.

This year, we've learned how to save our families, friends, congregations and communities by doing the opposite of what we usually do – keeping our distance from each other. Worshipping together, while staying apart, to celebrate the most important day of the Christian faith might bring us even closer in this second Easter that nobody will forget.

In a post-COVID world, we can come together to choose decisions and actions that make things “new.” What does that look like?

It looks like healing people who are hurt. It looks like feeding people who are hungry. It looks like loving people who are shunned. It looks like defending people who are overwhelmed. It looks like friends sharing food together. It looks like grieving over the loss of a friend. It looks like a conversation over a drink of cool water. It looks like helping the celebration along at a wedding. It looks like helping the lost find meaning in life.

It will involve risk, of course, but the risks we take, well, they are risks that Jesus took all the time. If we get afraid that we will not be able to do the whole journey, well, God doesn't ask us to complete a whole journey today. No, we only need to take the next steps, to find the next resting place, to gather for the next meal, to find the next quiet time to be with God to gather ourselves for the next part of the journey.

Those women that first Easter were scared. The gospel says that they didn't tell anyone anything. Of course they did! that's why you and me and billions around the world are celebrating Easter today. They moved beyond their fears, and they told, told the whole story of Jesus' love and grace.

Jesus' death showed us how far love will go, what love looks like when it is played out to its fullest. Don't you want to live your life to the fullest? Then follow Jesus to Galilee.

I'd like to close with this poem by Wendell Berry:

A Spiritual Journey

And the world cannot be discovered by a journey of miles,
no matter how long,
but only by a spiritual journey,
a journey of one inch,
very arduous and humbling and joyful,
by which we arrive at the ground at our feet,
and learn to be at home.

Amen.