

Easter Sunday-B(1) The scripture text is taken from Mark 16:1-8

The story is told of a psychiatrist who was visiting a psychiatric hospital and the psychiatrist, was dealing with a man who believed that he was Jesus Christ. So the psychiatrist goes into the room to meet this man. The psychiatrist says to the man; "Are you Jesus Christ?" "Yes my son" came the reply. So the psychiatrist said; "Wait here. I'll be back in just a minute." The man was a little confused by his sudden departure, but returned in just a few minutes with a measuring tape. The psychiatrist asked the man to stand up and to stretch out his arms. Then the psychiatrist measured the width of his arms, and then measured his height, from head to toe. As soon as the psychiatrist finished measuring the man who claimed to be Jesus, the psychiatrist left the room again. The man who claimed to be Jesus, didn't know what to think of this. But not long after this, the psychiatrist came back with a large hammer, some large spiked nails and two large and thick wooden boards. The psychiatrist started hammering the nails and putting the cross together. The man who claimed to be Jesus said; "What are you doing, as his voice begin to rise". The psychiatrist asked; "Are you Jesus Christ?" Once again the man said; "Yes, my son". Then the psychiatrist replied; "Then you know why I am here." Somehow, the man who claimed to be Jesus Christ, suddenly remembered, who he really was. He began yelling; "I am not Jesus, I am not Jesus, my name is Randal, Randal Jones!" When Randal saw the cross and the large nails, he wasn't interested in being Jesus anymore. (I wonder why?)

The horror of Friday is over, when Jesus was nailed to that Roman Cross on Golgotha's Hill outside of the city of Jerusalem. Jesus' body has been taken down, and placed in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, outside of the city of Jerusalem.

Just to insure that His disciples would not steal the body, Governor Pontius Pilate, at the request of the Jewish religious leaders, placed a contingent of soldiers there to guard the tomb.

So according to the writer of Mark's Gospel our story picks up with three faithful women, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome, who were there at the cross to see Jesus die, they went and brought spices to anoint His body, which had been placed hastily in the tomb.

We can assume from this detail, that these three women truly loved Jesus, in spite of the fact that He had been executed as a common criminal.

Early Sunday morning, these three women set out to the tomb in which Jesus' body had been placed.

They made this journey, not just to give Jesus a proper burial, but to lessen their grief. And as many of us know, grief has a way of causing us not to think too clearly, to ignore the practical situations of life.

Thus, in the midst of their journey, it dawns on them that they were not able to roll away the stone that sealed the entrance to the tomb, to gain access to Jesus' body.

But they kept on with their journey, and when they could see the tomb, they were surprised, that the stone had already been moved.

And when they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, just sitting there, and they were alarmed.

Who among us, wouldn't be frightened to death on encountering such a situation? Even if the angel did say, "Don't be alarmed", it would take a while for the adrenaline to return to normal levels.

But their shock did not end with the mysterious young man's admonition to be calm. He also told these grieving women, that the body of Jesus, that they came to anoint, was not there, but that He had risen from the dead, and that they should go, and tell the disciples, to go to Galilee, where Jesus would meet them.

But instead of jumping up and down with joy and jubilation, instead of singing joyous hymns of praise to God, as we do this morning, the writer of Mark's Gospel, tells us that these women left the empty tomb, being seized by terror and amazement, and said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid. And with these words, many scholars believe, the original Gospel of Mark ends there.

So what are we to make of this text? First of all, I believe, that we can assume that the women who went to the tomb, early that first Easter morning, came in grief, but left in fear.

Such an experience would be enough to unnerve even the calmest among us. When a person whom you had seen die, is buried, and you go to the tomb, you expect the remains of that person to still be there.

We would not expect to see the grave open, and a stranger dressed in a white robe, to tell us that our departed loved one, had risen from the dead. That sort of thing just does not happen.

Of course, eventually, these three women had to have overcome their fear, and began to share with the other disciples, and others what they had experienced, or the Church as we know it today, would not be in existence.

I believe that anytime we experience something out of the ordinary, it takes time for us to process it, but eventually, we need to share it. And what these women experienced that day, had to be an unworldly experience.

So according to the writer of Mark's Gospel, these women just didn't experience fear, but also terror, and amazement.

These words, I believe, really grasp the heart of the situation that confronted the women, and us.

Think with me for a moment, about the significance of what the young man in the white robe proclaimed to the women: "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, that he is going ahead of you to Galilee." (verses 6-7).

Clearly there would be amazement that God had intervened, and raised his Son from the dead. And in so doing, it would have vindicated Jesus, not only to be His incarnate Son, the promised Messiah, but it would have given credence to all that He said and did.

Clearly, the resurrection of Jesus, attests to the fact that at the very least, His ministry found favor with God.

And where does this leave the disciples? Could it be that the terror the women felt that day, was the thought of meeting the risen Christ?

After all, think of Peter, whom Jesus referred to as the rock of faith, meeting Jesus risen from the tomb, and having to explain to him (that would Peter), why he denied even knowing him, three times during Jesus' mock trial, that would be a terrifying experience.

Think of all the other ways that the disciples failed to trust Jesus. All throughout His ministry, the disciples seemed not to grasp, who Jesus really was, or what Jesus was trying to do.

Those women who left the empty tomb that day, according to the writer of Mark's Gospel, left the tomb seized with terror and amazement.

And when I think about my own life, and the times that I have not been a true witness to my faith in Christ, in a sense, I have deserted Him, I can understand the terror as well as the amazement, that these women experienced.

But this brings me back to the teachings of our Lord, to view them with more seriousness. I think of the parable of the "Prodigal Son".

We all know this story that Jesus told, in the parable; the youngest son, begs his father for his share of his inheritance, and then goes off to a distant country and squanders it away in sinful living. But when the misbehaving son comes to his senses, he returns home, and his father welcomes him home, but the older brother was not happy about this at all, but the Father tells the older brother that his love is there for him too.

That is the message that Jesus proclaimed throughout His ministry. That is the reason, why Jesus went to the cross, to take upon Himself the sins of the world, to become our paschal lamb, that we might truly know the grace of God's redeeming and amazing love for sinners, like you and me.

Yes, it is a terrifying thought to face the risen Christ, when we will all eventually meet Him as one of His disciples.

Through the power of God, for His glory, Christ Jesus has been raised from the dead, we cannot avoid meeting Him.

Yet at the same time, as humbling and terrifying as this encounter might seem to us, we can trust the Lord's promise of His forgiving and redeeming grace.

May God's Holy Spirit, give us the courage and the will, to live in, "the fear and the love of God" as Luther often phrased his teachings, that we might truly live in the hope of the resurrection.

For in Jesus, the crucified and risen Son of God, God has atoned for us our sins, and offers us eternal life in His Kingdom.

But let us not take lightly the grace of God. For I believe this is the message that the writer of Mark's Gospel gives us, describing the women's reaction in terms of "terror, amazement, and fear".

These are certainly terms our world does not understand in relation to God. I have said this before, and my views have not changed on this at all, I do believe that we are living in the "last days" the "end-times", and that the world is going to mock, ridicule and reject the this message of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The world out there with all of its madness, and all of its insanity, is going to try and silence us, as those who profess our faith in Christ.

But today, we don't need to be silent, in fact, I believe that our world is dying to hear this message of Easter, that God raised Jesus from the dead and in so doing, offers what the world cannot offer, and that is: forgiveness of sins, peace, hope and the promise of life everlasting with a God who loves you and I more than we will ever know.

So on this Easter Sunday, this beautiful day, let the power of God's Holy Spirit come into our lives as one of the risen Christ's disciples, let His grace overcome our fears, and proclaim the message, to a world that so desperately needs to hear, that Christ is risen today, alleluia, alleluia, alleluia. Amen.

Let us pray:

Lord God, Almighty God, You sent your only begotten Son into this world to take on our flesh and blood and became one of us. Lord God, we remember His life among us, we remember His sacrifice, and the shedding of His holy and precious blood upon that cross for our sins, and we remember His resurrection from the dead and empty tomb. Fill our hearts with courage, that we as an Easter people may go forth here this day, and proclaim the good news, that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead, lives forevermore, and one day soon, will return to this world in power and in glory, to take us home to be with Him forevermore. All this we humbly pray, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.