

SCRIPTURE READING: Mark 16:1-8

When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. ² And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. ³ They had been saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" ⁴ When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. ⁵ As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. ⁶ But he said to them, "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. ⁷ But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you." ⁸ So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

“The Light Goes On”

“The evidence of Easter,” said the late Rev. Peter Gomes, *“is a reconfigured people, an Easter people, who are no longer afraid of the dark, people who dare to live by their affections and not by their fears, people who fear neither life nor death... for death in all of its cynical, calculating, greedy ways, no longer has control over them. They have a better idea, they claim a greater truth, they live because they are loved; and because they are loved, they can live.”*¹

Well THAT about sums it up I think. That about sums up what today and all that brings us here today is about. It is what the women, Mary Magdalene, Salome, and the other Mary so desperately needed to know on that first Easter morning, when they found themselves lost in grief, powerless to hear anything about being loved by God, and so very afraid...in fact, terrified.

You recall, that when they arrived at the tomb, they found the large stone already rolled aside. Sitting in the place where Jesus had been was a man, a stranger in white who said a very strange thing to them, *“Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus. He has been raised; he is not here...”* What? The women had been through an awful week. They’d seen it all, in its gory horror, played out in front of them, and they were still numb. Subconsciously, maybe they could have known his death was coming. He’d predicted it, and certainly it was likely to occur since he was always pushing the envelope, lifting up the weakest, the defenseless, welcoming the stranger, loving the sinner, touching the untouchable, all in the face of the powers that be. Yes, they might have known his death was coming but THIS, this they could not ever have really anticipated nor could they understand. It could not be true. Jesus had died. They’d seen him. Dead people stay dead. Yet here now they stood in an empty tomb, with a stranger in white telling them he’d been raised. Of course, the women were terrified! In fact, the final words of Mark’s gospel are, *“So they went out and fled, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.”* (long pause)

You know, sometimes, because the connection between springtime and Easter is made for us so effortlessly...the landscape is starting to come ablaze with wildflowers, with Bluebonnets and

¹ Peter Gomes. *“What we Forgot to Tell You”* (Boston: The Harvard Memorial Church;2003). Quoted in John Buchanan. *“The End is the Beginning.”* <https://www.fourthchurch.org/sermons/2006/041606.html>. (accessed 3-30-21)

Indian paintbrushes blooming, and birds begin our mornings now with songs...renewed creation

is all about us... we begin to consider that resurrection is “as natural a thing as bunnies being born and as butterflies crawling out of cocoons.”² But there is nothing about resurrection that is natural. Resurrection is a crazy, unnatural process. It IS a gloriously EXTRAordinary thing, with the divine fingerprint all over it, and it IS frightening.

As one commentator says, “*It simply transcends reason and intellect, confounds what we think we know about about everything, but especially the final foe, death.*”³ Ah death, in all of its “cynical, calculating, greedy ways”, is as inevitable as night follows day.⁴ (pause) You know, the case has been made that because Peter was aware that Jesus was already speaking of his approaching death at the Last Supper, when he asked Jesus “*Lord, where are you going?*”, he was really asking, “*Are you going anywhere at all or are you going just out like a light?*” It IS the question all of us have about our foe, death, isn’t it? Do our lives run out when we die? Is there anything else? Did Jesus’ life just go out like a flame of a candle or the flick of a light-switch?⁵

*On Easter Sunday morning, seven years ago, my mother passed away. I will, I suppose never preach an Easter service without thinking of her. I will always look for the Easter grackle, who appeared that Sunday morning to sit atop our Church roof, and sang through the whole service. One Sunday within the first weeks after she died, I made a phone call to her. I did it by habit, since Sunday afternoons were our usual times to talk and catch up on the week and the happenings in each other’s lives. When I realized what I’d done, I felt instantly embarrassed, but what was strange was that my embarrassment didn’t cause me to hang up right away. And I’ve been comforted somehow to know that others have done the same kind of thing.*⁶ Author Frederick Buechner admits to having called his brother’s NY apartment after his brother died. He says, “*I knew there wasn’t anybody there but who could say that at least some echo of him might have been, the sound of his voice, his marvelous laugh maybe. So I let the phone ring, let it ring, let it*

² Ted Wardlaw. “Unnatural Event. Luke 24:1-12” <https://www.christiancentury.org/article/2007-03/unnatural-event>. (accessed 3-31-21)

³ John Buchanan. “The End is the Beginning.” <https://www.fourthchurch.org/sermons/2006/041606.html>. (accessed 3-30-21)

⁴ <https://www.quotemaster.org/Death+is+inevitable> (accessed 3-31-21)

⁵ Frederick Buechner. *Sermon: Let Jesus Show*” In: *Secrets in the Dark*. (New York: Harper Collins;2006), 265-71

⁶ John Buchanan.

ring. “ He goes on, “*Jesus’ answer to Peter’s question was, ‘Let not your heart be troubled. In my Father’s house are many rooms.’ ...So I would bet my bottom dollar that in one of those many rooms, that phone rang and was heard. I believe that in some sense my brother’s voice was in that ringing and that Jesus’ voice was in it too.*”

Yes, friends, when the angel at the tomb that morning told the women “*Go, for Jesus is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you,*” he was affirming that Jesus’ life did not go out like a light. No! Jesus’ life went on Easter morning! His light went on! and on and on and on. It still goes on...to light our way, and because of this, our death, our ultimate foe, well, it no longer has control over us. We can live differently now.

How? Well, whatever is preaching cynicism and cold-heartedness, shame and guilt, paralyzing grief, betrayal, forsakenness, that which survives best on a diet of our FEAR, that which is trying to drag us down...we are not now powerless before it. We can live freely, knowing that evil does not win, we can face it all. And we can care passionately, love without reservation, and courageously do Jesus’ work in the world. We can be the “*reconfigured people, Easter people*” that Rev. Gomes was talking about “*who live because we are loved and because we are loved we can live*”. (pause)

You know, I believe the women came to know this. While Mark’s gospel ends by saying that they said nothing to anyone for they were afraid, the women must have told. Otherwise, how would we know? Ah, Christ’s light. It went on that first Easter morning and it goes on and on and on. And so does ours....today, tomorrow and always. There is nothing to fear now, friends. Christ is risen, friends. He is risen indeed. X 2! Hallelujah! Amen.