

Mark 16:1-8 Easter

March 31, 2024

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Grace and peace be with you from God our Father and our risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

So, when was the last time you were absolutely stunned? Like, something happened that totally shocked you, or surprised you?

For me, it was while I was looking out my back door a few weeks ago, just checking things out, not expecting much – and there was a fox on my fence!

I was stunned. My body shook and it took a minute for me to even utter the word – fa-a-a-ox.

I wasn't expecting it and my whole body reacted in shock. It was so weird.

Once I finally got my senses put back together the fox was on its way. I think it was shocked to see me as well.

I wonder if when the women saw the tomb empty and the young man sitting in the tomb if their experience was similar to mine – complete shock – so much so that speech was removed from them and they weren't able to say anything.

Although... They must have said something eventually, right? We know at some point they must have said something, because we all know that Jesus is resurrected from the dead. Mark even tells us so. So, something must have happened.

The thing with the Gospel of Mark is that in the last two chapters he is asking us who we will emulate. Will we be like Judas who betrays Jesus, Peter who denies knowing Jesus, the Centurion who proclaimed Jesus to be God's son, Joseph of Arimathea who boldly took Jesus body off the cross, or the women who said nothing.

Who will we be, especially now that we know the good news? How will we respond? Will we say nothing or will we share the good news like Mark himself is doing? Who will you be – a secret keeper or an evangelist?

The idea for Mark was that his audience would say – I'll go and tell! I won't be like the women. I'll tell everyone!

Although, the women weren't exactly secret keeper. The good news did come out, and how did it come out if they said nothing?

In Bishop Eaton's Easter message, she makes the very good point that our English translation isn't the best. In the NRSV, it may appear that the women kept silent and went back to the way things were the day before, with Jesus still dead in the tomb, that they kept silent and pretended the resurrection did not happen at all, but that is a misrepresentation of the Greek text.

In the Greek, the women were filled with amazement, ekstasis, which is where we get the word ecstatic, which literally means to be standing in a new place. The women were literally standing in a different place than they were just a second ago. With the knowledge of Jesus resurrection, they were standing in a whole new world, a world in which a tomb does not hold the dead, but the living!

And the word that is translated as fear, phobos, means that they were trembling in awe, which is a normal reaction to being in the presences of God. We see it happen quite often in the Bible when God's presence is known, people hit the ground overcome with awe. Kind of like shock at seeing a fox on the fence, but an infinity greater than that.

And when it says they were seized with fear, it actually means that they were possessed by the awe. Awe had taken over them – like being struck by a lightning bolt, and that caused them to flee from the tomb back out into the world, but in a different state than that in which they had arrived.

So, the reason the women weren't able to really say anything to anyone is because they found themselves on the other side of a great chasm, the other side of reality, the other side of death, in their own resurrection if you will, and they couldn't explain it to anyone else. Others would have to come into this new place on their own once they understood the amazing news that Christ is risen from the dead and that death has lost all its power.

Once the resurrection is understood and death is no longer feared, all anxiety disappears and we are left standing in a new place, a new reality where we are fearless, where we live as having already been resurrected from the dead ourselves.

That is what we celebrate in Baptism and why Baptism is so predominately partnered with the Easter celebration. In Baptism, we are made one with Jesus in his death and resurrection.

We have died to sin and are alive in Christ, which means that all the forces that may have held us captive are no longer confining. We are set free.

We have no fear of sin or death, because we know that Jesus is resurrected from the dead and because of that we are eternally connected to God who gives us eternal life.

That is the new reality in which we live in the good news of the resurrection. It is the new reality in which we stand in the face of all things that come our way.

It reminds me of the statue in New York City of the little girl standing defiantly in front of the bull on Wall St. She is fearless even though the bull is intimidating.

There is a lot going on in the world that others may tell us to fear – you better be afraid of this, that, or the other - but we are firmly standing in a different place. We are standing in the resurrection and because of that we have nothing to fear. We have peace in Christ, and we share the peace we have in Christ by living in this different place, by sharing our reality, and leading by example.

Our friend Paul was absolutely changed by his encounter with the resurrected Christ, and so he went out and preached to everyone who would listen, and even those who wouldn't, and he didn't just preach with words. He preached by how he lived.

People saw that he was fearless and that is what caught their attention. Paul was beaten regularly, imprisoned numerous times, and was even bit by a poisonous viper, and in the midst of it all, he was fearless. He was fearless because he was possessed by the Holy Spirit and standing in a different place than others, a place of peace, and that is what attracted people.

In Baptism, we too are possessed by the Holy Spirit.

So, when we go out from here and proclaim the good news, know that it is not only by our words that people will know the resurrection, but by our actions, by how we live in the world.

Are we living in fear or are we living in the peace of Christ? People can definitely tell the difference.

So, go ahead and be like the women. Run out into the world with awe and amazement, possessed by the Holy Spirit, and the good news of resurrection will be made known in the world through the way you live, connected to Christ in life everlasting, in eternal life and everlasting peace.

Happy Easter! Christ is risen. He is risen indeed! Alleluia!!

Thanks be to God!