“Opening Our Lives: Opened by Love”
Homily by Rev. Patricia Farris

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. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. They had been saying to one another, ‘Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?’ When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. 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.  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.’ 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.

Well, church, after a year-long Lent—doesn’t it feel like it’s been a whole year of Lent??—aren’t we more than ready to hear and say these words:

Christ is Risen!  HE IS RISEN INDEED!

Let’s preach this sermon together. Each time I say “Christ is Risen!” I’m going to hear your voices ringing in my heart saying: HE IS RISEN INDEED!


We’re more than ready for today, aren’t we? Please, God, may this truly be Easter. May the words ring true: Christ is Risen. HE IS RISEN INDEED!

This year we hear the Easter story from the Gospel of Mark, as Michael just read it for us. It’s the perfect version of the story for the year we’ve just experienced. It’s strange and strong. Even the earliest Christians found it difficult to end at verse 8 with those words: “for they were afraid” and have pasted a variety of extra verses onto the end to make it more like the resurrection accounts in Matthew and Luke. You will find those extra verses in your Bibles usually in parentheses or italics to show that they are a later addendum.

But Mark’s style was consistently rough and abrupt. In fact, his wording ends even more abruptly than our current translation would suggest, something more like: “and they were afraid, for…” Just like that. Boy, we could fill in the rest of that sentence, couldn’t we, with a whole list of things that make us afraid…

But Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome were strong women, faithful disciples. They had come up from Galilee with Jesus, had gone through many things with him already, and surely were not afraid of much of anything by that point. They had remained at the cross when all the other disciples had fled. They were not afraid of the soldiers. They were eager to get at their work at the crack of dawn, leaving while it was still dark to arrive in time. They were not afraid of the dark. Their society had not yet handed over care of the dead to undertakers. Their loving task was to anoint their teacher’s body and prepare it for burial. They were not afraid of the dead.

The only thing they wondered about that morning was a practical task: how they would move the heavy stone. But they soon discovered that the stone has already been rolled away. They entered the opened tomb in astonishment, and the angelic messenger, true to form, reassures them: “Do not be amazed”, he says. “You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified.”

This is the story the women had been telling themselves, the story they expected to hear. They came looking for Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified.
But immediately, the angel shifts into God-talk and re-tells the story a new way. Here’s what really happened, the angel insists: “He has been raised (and only God could do that!). He is not here, in the place they put him. Go and tell the others that he’s going ahead of you to Galilee and you will find him there, just as he told you.”

Now the angel is telling the story of Easter’s Good News for the first time. The one condemned and crucified could not be contained in a tomb. Even death could not keep him prisoner. The story of Jesus is not ultimately about his fate at the hand of his enemies. It is the account of what God has done in and through him. The power of God has raised him up! And just as he promised, he is going on ahead and you will find him where he said he would be. The promise is true. The hope is not in vain.

Christ is Risen. HE IS RISEN INDEED.

Just as in Jesus’ time, and in the experience of the women who went to the tomb that first Easter morning, have we not been feeling the weight of fear, anxiety, violence, and illness, even unto death? Have we not longed for someone to roll away the stone from the entrance to the tombs of this world?

The Easter story proclaims that God has done it! The tomb that has held our worst fears and sorrows is empty. Life prevails! Love wins! Jesus is already going on ahead into a new future.

One of our fabulous Lenten devotional writers—and a heartfelt thanks to all of you on behalf of us all—Kaitlyn Plukas, closed her devotion quoting the American author, bell hooks: “Love is an action, a participatory emotion...[and] the practice of loving is the healing force that brings sustained peace. It is the practice of love that transforms... Renewing our faith in love’s promise, hope is our covenant.”

That’s exactly what Easter is for us this year, this holy day that renews our faith in love’s promise and makes hope our covenant. So let’s keep going, church, loving our way into all that this new year will bring. Being a message of hope for our neighbors, our community, our world. For wherever charity and love prevail over injustice and violence, wherever compassion and hope replace cynicism and despair, wherever peace and love take root in lives that are empty and lost – there is the risen Christ, going on ahead, beckoning us to join him in living into God’s new dream.

Are you ready to be opened by love? Are you ready for all the tombs of this earth to be opened by love? Rejoice!

Christ is Risen! HE IS RISEN INDEED!

Notes:
