

"God Is Present For Us In His Word"

Text: Mark 16:1-8

4/1/2018 (Easter Sunday)

Do you know what Easter is about? Easter is about creation being restored to its Creator, with the crown of creation: mankind, being restored to the presence of God. We've been talking a lot of late here at Faith about God's presence - God's saving, loving presence; God's presence as Friend, not Foe. We lost the presence of God with the fall into sin, but with the death and resurrection of God's Son: Jesus Christ, God's presence has been restored to us. The Gospel of Mark says that God is present for us in His Word, and so to that we now turn our attention ...

As we do, we return to our Gospel reading for today, where we hear again St. Mark say that:

"When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint (Jesus). And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. And they were saying to one another: 'Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?'"(Mark 16: 1-3)

That was a legitimate question, because the stone would have been quite large, and heavy, and it would've been quite difficult for the women to move. But of course they didn't have to move it, because Mark tells us that upon:

" ... looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back ... And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. And he said to them: 'Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, Who was crucified. He has risen; He is not here. See the place where they laid Him. '"(vs. 4-6)

The young man went on to say:

"Go, tell His disciples and Peter that He is going before you to Galilee. There you will see Him, just as He told you."(v. 7)

And He had told them. For on the night in which He was betrayed, while celebrating His holy Supper with the disciples for the first time, Jesus said to them:

" ... after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee."(14:28)

With that we see on display at the end of Mark's Gospel one of its major themes: Jesus' words are reliable. In the Gospel of Mark, when Jesus says something is so, it is; when Jesus says something is going to happen, it does; if Jesus says you better plan on something, you better plan on it. Again, in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus' words are reliable -you can count on what He says being true. For anybody reading and taking the Gospel of Mark seriously, Jesus' resurrection from the dead and ensuing message to meet His disciples in Galilee should come as no surprise. After all, it's what He had said would happen.

But what does that mean for us? Well it means a couple of things: 1) We can take what the Bible says seriously, and count on it being true, especially Mark's Gospel. 2) Goes back to our theme for today - and really, for this entire past weekend: God's presence has been restored to us with Jesus' resurrection. To see that though, we need to dig a little deeper into the Gospel of Mark ...

In Mark's Gospel, when people are said to be afraid, filled with amazement or astonished, they are in the presence of the divine. How interesting then that Mark says this about the women at Jesus' empty tomb:

" ... they went out and fled the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had seized them, ... "(16:8a)

In the Gospel of Mark, their "trembling and astonishment" is an indicator that they were in the presence of God.

In spite of their being afraid, God's presence was a good thing, but to see that we need to dig a little deeper still into Mark ...

Those of you who were here last Good Friday evening will recall our mention of the "young man" who followed Jesus from a distance into the Garden of Gethsemane, and who when seized, ran away naked. For those of you who were not here on Good Friday, it seems as though the man was wearing what we may call "pajamas" - Mark says he was clothed with "nothing but a linen cloth about his body" (14:51b). When those seizing him grabbed him, they grabbed the rather flimsy clothing he had on: the linen cloth, and he was able to run away from them only by running out of the cloth, naked, but free. It's interesting that some scholars think that young man may have been none other than the writer of the 2nd Gospel - Mark! While we can't know that for sure, what we can know is how Mark uses what happens to the young man symbolically to convey meaning about Jesus' resurrection.

What I mean is this: In Mark's resurrection account this morning, the angel in the tomb is not called an angel, but a "young man." Did you notice that? We know from the other Gospel accounts that he had to be an angel, but Mark doesn't call him that; he calls him a "young man." Why? Well, where else have we heard about a "young man" in Mark's Gospel? You guessed it: the "young man" who wanted to get away from Jesus so bad that he ran away from Him in the Garden of Gethsemane naked (Mark 14). How shameful it must have been for that "young man" to run around in public, heading back to wherever his home was, without any clothes on. How shameful it must have been for him later on, when he realized what he did, running away from his Lord in cowardly fear.

But the story of the "young man" doesn't end there, for in Jesus' empty tomb we see him symbolically in the "young man" of the angel, no longer in naked shame, but clothed in the "white robe" of Jesus' resurrection, the "white robe" of Jesus' forgiveness. The book of Isaiah tells us that:

" ... though (our) sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; ... " (1: 18)

and the apostle Paul says that:

"As many of you who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been clothed with Christ."(Galatians 3:27)

When Mark mentions the "young man" clothed in a "white robe" sitting in the empty tomb of Jesus, he is saying that the shameful nakedness of sin is now covered with the holiness of Christ. Sin has lost its power to shame, for Christ has risen victorious over it! And that goes for all sin, and all sinners: as we celebrated at last night's Vigil service, we have been clothed with Christ's holiness in our Baptism, so Christ's resurrection victory is ours.

And so, it doesn't matter that the "young man" forsook his Lord; it doesn't matter that Peter denied his Lord. And did you notice that? The "young man" makes special mention of Peter to the women:

" ... tell His disciples and Peter that He is going before you to Galilee."

Peter had denied Jesus. But that didn't matter, because Jesus died for that sin, and then rose again victorious over it. Jesus paid for all sin, and rose victorious over all sin, so that for those who belong to Him in faith, no sin matters. Which means that there's nothing left that can separate us from God. We are restored to God's presence because God's Son: Jesus Christ, is risen from the dead! Clothed with Christ in our Baptism, we need no longer be ashamed of our sin. Forgiven by Christ, we rejoice to be in the presence of God.

And rest assured folks, God is present for us, in His Word. Do you know that, in the Gospel of Mark, there are no resurrection appearances of Jesus? In the other Gospels there are, but in Mark you never see the risen Christ. That is consistent with Mark's overall theme of the reliability and truthfulness, and therefore also the importance, of Jesus' Word, because it's all Mark leaves us with! Mark says to us:

"He has risen; He is not here. . . . But go, tell His disciples and Peter that He is going before you to Galilee. There you will see Him. just as He told you."

Repeat above. "Just as He told you." As with everything else in Mark, Jesus said it would happen, and it did.

It's interesting that, very early (1:14) in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus begins His ministry in Galilee. With his mention of Galilee in his words to the women, it's as if the "young man" in the empty tomb at the end of Mark is telling us to go back to the beginning of Mark and read it again. "I won't show you the risen Jesus," Mark says, "but I will give you His words." That is what Mark would have us take with us this Easter day: the Word of Jesus; the Word of Jesus Who is risen again from the dead; the Word of Jesus Who in His resurrection from the dead restored us to God's presence, just as He said He would. That's really all we have: Jesus' Word. It's all we need.

And with that we conclude. Ya know, I fully realize that it doesn't seem like we've been restored to God's presence, not in this sinful life. There's just so much that is shameful - in the world; in us. But that's where it's helpful to remember that, in the Gospel of Mark, things are not as they seem. In the Gospel of Mark, things are as Jesus says they are, and on that we rely.

This is what Jesus says folks: He is risen. He is risen! When we approach Him in His Word, we are every 'bit as much in the presence of God as were those women at the first Easter. Christ is risen; He is alive and well to restore us to God's presence forever. We have His Word on that! That's the message of St. Mark's Gospel, the message of this Easter here at Faith: that in the risen from the dead/ never to die again Jesus Christ, God is present for us, in His Word –

- In Jesus' ✝ Name,

Amen!