

Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church
Reverend Dr. Daris Bultena

The Resurrection of the Lord/Easter Day
April 12, 2009

Acts 10:34-43

³⁴Then Peter began to speak to them: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality,³⁵but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.³⁶You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all.³⁷That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced:³⁸how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.³⁹We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree;⁴⁰but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear,⁴¹not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.⁴²He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead.⁴³All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

Mark 16:1-8

¹When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. ²And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. ³They had been saying to one another, 'Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?' ⁴When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. ⁵As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. ⁶But 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. ⁷But 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.' ⁸So 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.

"In the Morning"

Oh, "Easter in the Garden," – it is this wonderful little book about Easter that we read in Shepherd's Kids. The main character in the book is a young boy named Micah. His job was to help his father who was the

tender of the garden. And Micah helped his dad, but he also loved to climb the ancient old olive tree that was in the middle of the garden.

He would climb the tree and perch there like he was a bird. One day he noticed a nest, and inside the nest were three small, speckled eggs. He wondered about the eggs. Would they hatch? When would they hatch? What kind of a bird would be inside?

He checked them every day, and each day they were the same. Still, and smooth, and speckled – no change.

Then the Sabbath came, and he was home with his family. They lit candles. They ate a meal of roasted lamb and bread. No one did any work that day. He and his family did talk about the terrible thing that had happened to Jesus the day before. How bad men had killed him. He also talked about those eggs and how it just seemed they were not going to hatch.

Early the next morning, Micah woke up and while it was still dark he left the house and made his way to the garden. He climbed up the tree and there they were. The three eggs were there as still as stones.

It was then that Micah heard some people coming. He hid behind the branch and he was as still as those eggs. They were quiet and they were crying—clearly they were upset. But then all of a sudden, there was a bright light and someone told them that Jesus was not dead.

Little Micah got so excited that he almost lost his balance in the tree. He had to grab a hold of the branch and just as he did so, he noticed something about the nest. One of the eggs was cracked, and a tiny beak was poking itself out of the shell.

Ah, what good news—Jesus was alive, and the little birds were hatching into life too!

What a great story!

I don't know that Micah ever existed, but I do know that Jesus is alive. He is Risen! He is Risen indeed!!

This fantastic little book has at least three things in common with the version of the resurrection story as it is told in the Gospel of Mark. First, unlike John's Gospel and Matthew's Gospel from which we are so accustomed to reading the resurrection story—unlike them, in Mark's Gospel and in the little book about Micah there is not an appearance from the risen Christ. It is about him—the story is about the living Jesus but he does not appear or converse with the lead characters.

The Second thing in common is the prominence of the women. And finally there is also the figure of a young man—in the book he is Micah, and in the gospel it is a young man that announces the resurrection to the women.

It is the role of the women that figures prominently here in Mark's gospel. In fact, all the gospel accounts have the women as the ones who go to the tomb early in the morning. I think there is something here for us—there is a word from the Lord in the presence of those women.

Mark makes a real point out of the time of day. He tells us enough detail that we had better pay attention to it. Here in 16:2 "And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb." It is that detail—"when the sun had risen." Yes it is morning—but there is more than time of day going on here. "When the sun had risen" that is in direct contrast to 15:33 "When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon."

There is a contrast here between light and darkness. We are supposed to pick up on that and truly make something of it. There is more at play than light and darkness. Just like that darkness in the middle of the day on Friday being a cosmic event—we are to get it here that this is a cosmic event too. God has worked an amazing thing here—this is not an ordinary morning. All mornings can be folded into this moment—it was as big as the creation—and as deep as the universe.

And it is in that light—that the women come. Where were the men? Where were the disciples? Where were those who were part of the inner circle? I don't know. And I don't want to be critical of them either—but I do want to notice that these inner circle women do come.

They come and they bring with them spices. They are going to treat the dead body of Jesus. They loved him—and even now they want to do all they can for him. Some are critical of the women—that they were like the rest and they did not believe. After all—even though they were walking in the light of day they were still dwelling in the cosmic darkness.

It was in such darkness that they came ready to attend to a dead body rather than recalling and remembering the promise of what would happen on the third day. And so along the way they have this conversation about the stone and how will they get it removed—never expecting the good news they will hear.

So before they arrived at the tomb—maybe they did not get it entirely, but they got something. You see, I see in those women the kind of love that God has for us. That's right—I see in these women an incredible illustration of how God loves us.

It is a kind of love where death does not stop that love. Yes, death does not stop that love. Sure, Jesus had been brutally murdered; his bloody body was lifeless. That did not mean they would stop loving him.

Their love went on and was as powerful as it was when he was alive and with them. They were oh so very sad, but still oh so really in love. So they were willing to do this menial task of trying to make the dead body smell better and care for it lovingly. Death did not stop their love.

That is how God loves us. Death does not stop God's love. Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. That is the witness of this whole incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection movement—that nothing can stop the love of God. ...oh, that God's love reaches all the way out and all the way down to us no matter what.

It is true! And it is our comfort, and our promise, and it is worth believing.

Just this week an adult was asking—"So you really do believe that this guy—this Jesus—who was killed has come back to life and that God did that and it is what is going to happen to you? Do you really believe that." Yes! Yes! Yes! With everything that we are we can believe it! It might seem as unreal as can be and as outlandish as you can imagine—but it is what is really real. Praise God!

Praise God! Praise God that stone was moved when they got to the tomb. They were not going to be able to move that huge and heavy thing. And stunned though they are they go into the tomb. They expect to see and smell lifelessness there. Instead they encounter this young man. And Mark—who is Mr. Detail himself—tells us that it is a young man dressed in white. That young man dressed all in white tells the women, *"Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; his 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."*

The presumption is that the figure of this young man is an angel. I can't tell you what angels look like. But, I can tell you that they don't all have fluttery wings and look like big birds. God's presence can make an appearance in many different forms. I encourage you to be alert to the reality that God's presence is around you and about you and surrounds your being and moves where you move.

Experiences with God are authentic. They are believable. They are real. You are, and have, and will have them. They are diverse. Embrace those experiences of the Holy One.

I would also implore you to hear this message that is heard about 80 times in the Biblical narrative from angelic like forms—"Do not be afraid." Oh, we live so much of our life in fear. It is not about fear—it is about trust and faith. But oh when some divine message comes that says—"Do not be afraid," that is usually a shaking in your boots moment.

Those women that day had to be shaking in their boots. Not only was the tomb open, not only was there no body there, but there was this dressed in white young man telling them—"*I know who you are looking for—he is not here—go and tell his disciples—he will meet you all in Galilee, just like he told you.*"

Get on with it. Get on to Galilee. Why? Jesus had told them in 14:28 "*But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.*"

*

But then there is that last verse in the Gospel of Mark—"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."

That is how the Gospel of Mark ends. There have been at least a couple of additional endings that have been written to the book—but real

scholarship tells us that this is the final verse of the whole book. They are gripped with terror and amazement, and fleeing they say nothing to anyone—because they were afraid.

Their heads had to be swimming. They had to be more than stunned—they had to be numbed by now. They are so afraid they are speechless. Speechlessness is an authentic response to the presence of God.

They were afraid—and I think this was a scary thing. It really was—here they were in a place they had never been before. And it was an awesome feeling. I think that is the kind of fear we have with the holiness of God—yes scary fear, but more than that, deeper than that to true awesomeness.

Clearly they found their voice...

I love the twist in the children’s book “Easter in the Garden.” I love it because just as Micah hears the amazing news that Jesus is alive—it so throws him from his perch that he begins to fall from the tree. He has to quick grab a hold on the branch. It is in that grabbing a hold that he notices it—that he sees the beak of new life cracking through the egg.

Oh this is where life.

Get this brothers and sisters—this where life is and this is how God is with us. Just at that very moment when we are about to fall out of our tree. Just at that very moment when the world is about to crash in and we are about to plummet to the ground. Oh, just at that moment when we are about to plunge to nowhere good—grab. Grab!!

Grab a hold and open your eyes—open your mind—open your heart—and then after some of the numbness and stunned-ed-ness wears

off maybe even articulate the wonder of this God in the morning who is bringing about life in you in the very place you did not think it possible.

That is what God is doing in you—bringing about life in you in the very place you did not think it possible!!

Like that tiny beak breaking through that egg. This morning—and every morning—God is breaking through your old shell with a life that cannot die. Grab a hold. CHRIST IS RISEN. SO ARE YOU!!! Amen.