

Easter B
Mark 16:1-8
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Notes not for publication

You know, every year we preachers get ready for Easter by trying to find the perfect story, the illustration that will amaze the crowds and convince them of all the wondrous truth that they had not yet known. The pressure is on at Easter, and we think we've got to come up with a real zinger. One preacher, though, wrote on his blog this week what a member of his church had said to him once. This man said to the preacher, "You know, on these big days, you don't have to try so hard. Just say what needs to be said" (Ken Carter, 4/6/09, theolog.org).

So I thought about that. What is it that needs to be said today? We speak of the resurrection using fertility metaphors—butterflies, bunnies, and eggs; we celebrate spring with candy and new clothes and big meals and Mom making us come to church. But is this all that needs to be said today, this Easter, or is there something else?

You know, if we look to the gospel lesson, we find the women at the tomb of Jesus, so stunned by what they find there that they return home without saying anything to anybody. They came that morning, still shattered by his death, worried only about being able to get to him to rub spices on his dead body, and they were so terrified by the unexpected openness they found, the stone already rolled away, that they went home, mouths shut as tightly as the tomb had been. "Terror and amazement seized them, and they said nothing to anyone." And that's the end of the story in Mark. Sounds like an O. Henry short story. You'll find other verses added on in the Bible, but most scholars agree those came later, to soften this odd ending this first

Easter, when no one says anything to anybody. The gospel writer left it like this, and in so doing implied that someone else would have to finish it. So here we are, all these years later, and now it's ours to do. It's our job to say what needs to be said to finish this story. Since I'm the one with the microphone, I'll go ahead and start.

The first thing to say, I think, is that there is a whole lot that seems to stand between us and God. Some have come here today in tremendous pain. Maybe a loved one has died or left; maybe you're sick. Maybe you've watched your retirement account flatline over the last 6 to 8 months, or your job is teetering on the brink. Maybe you've come to the end of your own rope and don't know how you're going to hang on.

And as if life weren't hard enough, we human beings do our part to make it worse. We are people who carry pain, but we know how to dish it out, too. For our way in the world is a violent one—we wage war; we let children around the world starve; we burden the backs of the poor with the consequences of our lifestyle; we carry secret prejudice in our hearts toward each other. What we were called to recognize this Holy Week, this Good Friday, is that these are signs of our participation in the death of Christ. We don't always know we're doing it, but if we think Jesus ended up on the cross and in the grave by somebody else's hand, that maybe it was the Jews or the Romans or that evil-hearted traitor, Judas, then we are deluding ourselves and missing the point of the story. In our pain, in our fear, we kill that which seeks to save us and give us life. We resist the love of God with everything we've got. That needs to be said today, because we need to hear it.

But what we must also say is that, thanks be to God, God is not bound by what we do. No stone is too heavy for the risen Christ to roll away. Even our worst, God has promised today, will not stand. Now, I don't know if that sounds like good news to you, brothers and sisters, but it does to me. This needs to be said—the world belongs to God, and whatever violence and foolishness we intend and inflict upon it, the power of God will bring life where there was only death.

We must know by now that God is not going to do this in the way we expect. It's not going to be by the kind of power we like, the kind that makes us feel safe and powerful, powerful over bad people and evil out there, safe because God does what we want. The power of God comes by another way, in another guise. The power of God, which will prevail against the gates of hell itself, yet comes by surprise, in the mist and quiet, on the edge between darkness and light, in mystery and vulnerability, in dependency and sacrifice—in love, for both neighbor and enemy.

The proof of this power does not lie in the pages of the Bible. The proof of the resurrection does not depend on the words of a gospel story. The proof does not depend on your believing “the right things” or getting in big trouble if you don't. The proof of the resurrection of Christ is all around us, in hearts broken open, with compassion pouring out; in lives transformed, given new purpose by servanthood; in hands once clenched, now spread and extended in giving and loving. This needs to be said: We know that Christ is risen, because we have his body with us, because we are his body.

The angel on that first Easter told the women that Christ had gone out ahead of

them and awaited them in Galilee. So we can believe that, no matter where we go when we leave this place, Christ has already been there. He has already traveled the road that lies ahead of us, and now he's waiting up. So do not be afraid, people of Christ, and do not keep silent. The story rests with us now. By your word and by your deed, just say what needs to be said.