

Step Out of the Shade! Go!
Mark 16:1-8
Rev. Loren McGrail
Easter Morning
April 4th, 2021
Irondequoit United Church of Christ

...When day comes we step out of the shade,
 aflake and unafraid
 The new dawn blooms as we free it
 For there is always light,
 if only we're brave enough to see it
 If only we're brave enough to be it.
Amanda Gorham, Inaugural Poem 2021

Dear Ones, we have lived Lent all year long haven't we or maybe even Holy Saturday? We have lived with emptiness and loss, uncertainty, physical and social distancing. Have we not become well acquainted with tomb dwelling during our lock down or quarantine times? Are we not ready to be busted free? To get back a bit of the life we lost? Hugs between grandparents and grandchildren? Dinners with friends? Masks off between the vaccinated ones? All of us have had some experience of what it means to be without freedom of movement, to be imprisoned in our own homes, to even feel abandoned by lack of social contact, maybe even God's presence.

Before the crucified Christ can be celebrated as the Risen One, we need to remember the pain and suffering he experienced on the way to the cross; in particular, how he was deserted by his male disciples and turned over by the religious authorities and killed for sedition.

I invite you to recall also that he died from asphyxiation when his body hanging limp caved in upon his chest. He couldn't breathe like those over 500,000 who died this year gasping for air with Covid-19. He couldn't breathe like George Floyd with a knee on his neck or Daniel Prude with a bag over his head. Dear Ones, let us not forget this invisible cause of death when we reach out to touch his bloody wounds or the wounds of those still dying in our ICUs or over-policed streets. The Via Dolorosa runs through all our cities and towns, does it not?

Before the crucified Christ can be celebrated as the Risen One, we need to open our eyes and see that the stone that is as hard as our hearts and which has entombed us, has been rolled away. So, though you are scared or terrified, don't let it paralyze you. The One you seek has already claimed you, opened the tomb, and calls you to follow. Listen to the wisdom in these words from Father Macarius from Egypt: "But the Lord...breaks through the heavy stones that cover the soul. He opens the tombs. He, truly raises to life the dead person and leads their captive soul forth out of the dark prison

Finally, before the crucified Christ can be celebrated as the Risen One, we need to follow him to hell, the place we most fear. In the western church we call this the 'Harrowing of Hell.' It takes place on Holy Saturday. Christ goes there to liberate those souls who did not know him but have lived good and faithful lives. In the Orthodox tradition, Christ goes there to resurrect all of humanity as symbolized in his outstretched arm to Adam and sometimes Eve that we see the icons. Jesus does not come to save individual souls but everyone. Salvation and resurrection from the dead are for all not just Jesus. Hear the wisdom from this Ancient homily on Christ's encounter with Adam and Eve:

"I command you: Awake sleeper, I have not made you to be a prisoner in the underworld. Arise from the dead. Arise, O work of my hands, arise, you who were fashioned in my image. Rise, let us go hence, for you in me and I in you, together we are one undivided person."

Dear Ones, I invite you this year after our own harrowing of a year to imagine or believe in a God who resurrects not just his own son but all of his children, including us, including them we most despise, even our enemies.

Dear Ones, in Mark's Gospel there is both a tomb empty of Jesus and a tomb with a heavenly messenger telling the women to go, and tell the disciples to meet him in the Galilee. The resurrected Christ goes before us back to the Galilee bearing witness to God who seeks to bring new life to all. The good news of the resurrection empowers us, by the same spirit that raised Jesus, to live into the story as it continues to unfold--to finish it in our own everyday ordinary lives. New Testament N.T. Wright says that "Jesus' resurrection is the beginning of God's new project not to snatch people away from earth to heaven but to colonize earth with the life of heaven."

Rev. William Barber in his Easter sermon delivered online yesterday with the Friends of Sabeel says Jesus lives in our hope and that we must remain "prisoners of hope" as we seek to live lives that say no to empire's way of death and pain.

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, jr. whose life ended on April 4, 1968 reminds us that we are to "rededicate ourselves to the long and bitter, but beautiful struggle for a new world" every day.

So, Dear Ones, believing in the resurrection does not rest on historical fact, creed, or dogma. It means, as theologian Jurgen Moltmann said, "participating in this creative act of God...Resurrection is not a consoling opium, soothing us with the promise of a better world in the hereafter. It is the energy for a rebirth of this life. The hope doesn't point to another world. It is focused on the redemption of this one."

Dear Ones, the story is circular. There are no visions of glory, only that Jesus is on the road waiting for a post rendez-vous in the Galilee. We are invited to live resurrected lives which means to live while we are dying or in the face of certain death so we can be co-creators in helping to bring God's shalom, the Beloved Community to life. We end where we began in Mark 1:1, "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the son of God."

Dear Ones, Christ has risen! He has risen indeed! Alleluia! Let the light of the resurrected Christ shine in you. Step out of the shade! Go!