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St. Stephen's Church – Edina, Minnesota
9:00 and 11:15 a.m. Celebrations of the Holy Eucharist
Easter Sunday; April 1, 2018

“Seriously?”

Scripture: Mark 16:1-8; Easter B

If Jesus knew that after all that work, all his suffering, that those women were just going to run away from the tomb that morning all afraid and say nothing to anyone about anything, don't you think he would be rolling over in his grave?

But, of course, that's the problem. He's not in his grave to begin with. Couldn't even lie still for a full weekend. Couldn't give consideration to those poor women who only wanted to take care of his lifeless, broken body. And as Mark would tell it, Jesus was too hyperactive to even hang around to greet the women himself. Instead a spokesman was at the tomb to take care of the personal appearances. No wonder the women were afraid. Somebody alive and awake and talking in the tomb! No wonder the women said nothing. At first...

For obviously, sometime along the way those women told somebody about what they saw. Because they told somebody else, who told somebody else, who told somebody else, because, finally, somebody told us. And like that little whispering game we played when we were kids, the one where somebody whispers a line to one

person who whispers to the next, and the next, and the next, and by the time the message gets to the last person, it's usually way different from when it started, I don't doubt that this story we have in our time might be something different from the way it all actually happened. But, luckily, the four gospels tell somewhat differing versions of the Resurrection story, or I might wonder who conspired together to make such an astounding and unexpected event all too understandable, all too uniform.

Why is Mark's story of Jesus' resurrection my favorite? Because the women were scared speechless, that's why. Thank goodness somebody has the sense to know that you have to be just a little peculiar to *casually* accept the news that someone you saw dead a day or two ago couldn't even stay that way long enough for his own funeral. I'm making a little light of it now, because frankly, it's so darn serious. The reason we gather on Easter Sunday at church is not because of nice weather, or the return of Spring, or a family reunion; it's to say Jesus rose from the dead. And because he rose from the dead, we live in the hope that this life, with all its pains and trials, is not the end of our story. Jesus rose from the dead with the promise that we might too. And no matter how often Jesus might have told his friends that that was the plan, still it was unexpected! So whatever those women experienced, let's just say their first feelings were not clarity, joy, and comfort. They were, as the scripture puts it, "terror and amazement." You want to get my attention about resurrection from the dead, and you come to me with a story of all sweetness and light? Seriously? Life

is too hard, people can be too cruel, the world is too rough a place for everything to be sweetness and light. So you come to me with terror and amazement, and now you've got my attention. Seriously.

You know, before that first Easter morning, I figure those women who followed Jesus had a pretty bounded life. Probably not too much excitement. They knew their territory; they understood their limits. So think of what these women experienced when they heard the dead had apparently come to life. That was too much! Can't you just see those women running from the tomb for the safety of home when their worlds are blown open by what they experience on that first Easter morning? Their boundaries are violated by that tomb. Their beliefs are shaken to the core. I bet their distress was palpable, visible. I bet when their friends saw them, they asked, "What's the matter with you? Are you all right?" And just like the Bible infers, I bet they stammer out a tentative, "Oh, nothing, really. We're fine." They said nothing to anyone; they were afraid. Of course they were afraid. Wouldn't you be?

Now, for the die-hard skeptics among us, I entirely concede that a small group of frightened, silenced women does not a resurrection prove. But for me it's at least a pretty good start. It's a reasonable reaction. Authentic. And, of course, eventually the women worked up the nerve to talk about it. I suppose they told people not what

they saw, but what they didn't see: namely Jesus, dead, where they had left him. And their worlds got a lot bigger that day. Funny, ours did too.

We live in a pretty cynical time. Faith can get a bad rap. We don't think we need much authority in our lives beyond ourselves. We are basically free to choose what we will believe. And we are free to choose to believe in nothing. But those faithful women who came to care for their friend, Jesus, apparently had no such choice. Oh, they could have chosen not to believe what they saw, but I don't see how they could have chosen to believe nothing. Because *something* happened to them. Personally. Maybe I could say that... Jesus happened to them. As he happens again and again to countless persons generation after generation. It's like St. Augustine says: "Jesus departed from our sight that we might return to our hearts, and there find him. For he departed and, behold! He is here!"

I'm aware that the experience of Jesus is not always clear, or easy, or pretty. Remember, even the women at the tomb had the sense to be quiet at first. But the "terror and amazement" part, eventually gives way to what Jesus really asks of us: not fear, but love. Not that we always be entirely secure, but that we trust him enough to go out on a limb for him and for others who need us. Not that we always be right, but that we be humble, tolerant, open-minded, caring, and forgiving of others, forgiving of ourselves. Not that we be entirely certain of everything, but that we be

reasonably faithful. Not that we be silent regarding our faith, but that when we share our experiences of faith, we do so compassionately, respectfully, lovingly. We're to be a light in this world, remember? Jesus said that to his friends. And perhaps in the glow of that light, we will catch a glimpse of something in this world, some remarkable kindness, some extraordinary hope of faith, something maybe in someone else that makes us think: "Wow! He really is risen." Maybe someone else will think Jesus is risen because of what they see in you.

Or do you think that Jesus is still just rolling over in his grave?...