

*And they fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.*

The original ending of the Gospel of Mark is so unsettling. It is Easter; we know that Christ has risen from the dead, Alleluia! The community that gathered to hear the gospel of Mark also knew that Christ had risen from the dead. But in the original ending of Mark's gospel there is no appearance of the Risen Lord. It is a different ending from the other gospel stories. Just as this Easter is different from other Easters because of the pandemic. There is no common cup at communion, we have limited singing, we are wearing masks and social distancing. We are trying not to flee from the grief of this past year. We hope in the Lord as the first disciples did and like them, we have lived with fear and grief this past year. But we have also seen transformation as we gathered together as church online and then slowly started to regather. There is hope as people are being vaccinated that we will finally overcome this virus that has ravaged our lives this past year. We are waiting to see what plants will come back after the disastrous freeze in February. We wait with hope for the buds to appear on what look like dead branches. We wait as life comes back from what appears to be dead.

Mark's gospel, which was written decades after Christ's death and resurrection, was written by and for a faith community that knew how Christ's first disciples had deserted him. They also knew that the women who saw the empty tomb that first Easter had told others. The women and the other disciples had gone to Galilee and seen him. They had moved beyond their terror and amazement. Because Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome had moved beyond their fear and told the other disciples what they had seen and heard at the empty tomb, faith communities had formed, the gospels were written, people heard the good news that Christ had risen from the dead. People continued to be healed in Jesus' name; people were baptized into the church, the Body of Christ alive in the world.

This morning we will welcome Julian Sesay into the church, the Body of Christ alive in the world. We will also reaffirm our own faith in Christ by the renewal of our own Baptismal Vows. We are commanded, not suggested, but commanded by Christ to love the Lord our God with our entire being and to love our neighbors as ourselves. In our Baptismal Vows we say that we "will proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ." That "we will seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbor as ourselves." (BCP p. 293) As Peter said in the reading from Acts that we heard this morning, "we are witnesses to all that he did." We are commanded to preach to the people and to testify that [Jesus] is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead." We are to witness and testify with our lives. We are to go and tell others because Jesus has gone before us. We are following Jesus on the way.

The early church couldn't leave Mark's gospel with the men hiding behind closed doors in fear and the women running from the empty tomb in terror. The early church knew the story, they knew about the resurrection appearances, how Jesus came into the locked upper room bringing his peace to fearful disciples, how he appeared on the road to Emmaus, how he called Peter to breakfast on the beach and forgave him his denial. Jesus

had been among them and they knew it. So they added resurrection stories to the end of the gospel.

We continue to add resurrection stories to the end of the gospel as we live our lives and tell others how Christ has healed us, appeared to us and forgiven us. Stories of how we have moved beyond our fear and been healed, forgiven and made whole in Christ. Stories of how we have seen Christ as we sought to serve others in Jesus' name.

After the baptisms this morning and we recommit ourselves to proclaiming Christ as Lord in our lives, we will gather at the Lord's table. Christ will nourish us so that we, as his Body the Church may go out into the world to serve others in his name.

Our world is still trapped in fear and darkness. Gun violence threatens everyone's lives, bigotry is wrapped in words of religion and politics throughout our country, people are dying from lack of affordable health care. Violence is loose in the world and in our neighborhoods as people live in fear. Today is not that much different from Jesus' own time. Disciples who are truly willing to follow Christ are desperately needed. Christians who know the love of God in their own lives and are willing to reach out to their neighbors. Christians who follow Christ and do love their neighbors even when their neighbor looks different, comes from a different culture, is sexually different, or is economically different. The world needs Christians who will "strive for justice and peace among all people and respect the dignity of every human being." (BCP p. 294)

We can hide in fear and not share the faith that is within us, but that is denying the power of our Risen Lord. Christ has given us the gift of His own indwelling Spirit within us through the waters of our baptism. Christ has rolled away the stone that locked us in fear, the light of Christ shines through us to our world. The Pascal candle stands here as a symbol of the light of Christ shining in our midst. We will leave our service this morning carrying that light in our hearts out into our world. We are the hands and feet of Christ alive in our world. It is up to us to speak out for the dignity of every human being. It is up to us to seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbor as ourselves. We are Christ's witnesses in our world. We are anointed and sealed in baptism by the Holy Spirit and marked as Christ's own forever. Go and let that light of Christ shine forth from you to drive away the darkness and fear that threatens to engulf our world. Go into the world because "this is the Lord for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation!" (Isaiah 25:9)