

## EASTER SUNDAY | APRIL 4, 2021

ACTS 10:34-43 | PSALM 118:1-2, 14-24 | 1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-11 | MARK 16:1-8

This is the first Sunday we have had worship together since last March. That's something to be grateful for. Personally, I am grateful not to have to preach into a camera surrounded by empty pews. I am grateful not to have to run slides. I am grateful that I can talk to people without asking them to unmute themselves. And on a more serious level, I'm grateful for how other people have continued to make the love of God tangible in our lives.

It is easy, tempting even, to imagine that this is what resurrection is all about. Moving from death to life. It's easy to look around and see all kinds of green shoots, literal and metaphorical. You see your friends and neighbors getting vaccinated. You see people gathering with family they'd been apart from for so long. You see people planning weddings for next summer without an asterisk on the save the date. It is easy to look at the world and find signs of life.

But once you start looking around, you start seeing all kinds of other things, too. You see our community members who are still out of work and facing eviction. You see the people still struggling with addiction and isolation and depression. You see the same racism and xenophobia manifesting itself again and again in our country. And, to state the glaringly obvious, most people who don't have the privilege of living in high-income countries won't be vaccinated for a long time. If it's easy to find signs of life, it's just as easy to find signs of death.

Death and life aren't as separate as oil and water. Sometimes death and life are all wrapped up with each other. They combine in ways that can be as jarring as they are comforting. Our lives and our world just life or death. They're filled with both.

And so is St. Mark's account of the resurrection. St. Mark's account is, at first glance, strange. It isn't very long. The risen Jesus never appears. The women at the tomb are told to spread the good news, but they don't tell anyone about what they've seen. And for the grammar fans, Mark's gospel ends with a conjunction. Something like *Reader, I married him because. The end.*

It's such an abrupt ending that people in the early church started making up their own endings and tacking them on. They started adding on stories where Jesus appears to the disciples and ascends into heaven. *You know, Easter stories.* That make the whole thing a little more uplifting and positive, that put a nice bow on the end of the story.

But if Mark's ending strikes us as weird, it's probably because we imagine resurrection as a kind of reversal. If we had to explain Easter in our own words, we'd probably say that it's the day when Jesus came back to life. But you notice that the authors of scripture never describe it the way. Not the gospel writers. Not the author of revelation. Not St. Paul. Not the people who pretended to be St. Paul. They say Jesus has been raised. They say he has broken the bonds of death. They say he has been given new life. But they never say he has come back to life.

They are clear about that because resurrection isn't about going back. It isn't about undoing Good Friday. It isn't about going back to the way things were. It isn't about rounding up the disciples and going back to the good old days.

So even when we talk about new life, we're still acknowledging death. Jesus has been raised from death, but death and its effects still live all around us. *Alleluia, Christ is Risen*, but families flee their homes. People get evicted. Kids go hungry. Evil goes unpunished. We get sick and die. This isn't meant to be depressing. It's just being honest.

And perhaps this is why we need to hear St. Mark's account of the resurrection in particular this year. Because what we need is not a story that gets wrapped up nicely. Or a cliché about hope that's based on nothing. Or a "Look on the bright side" or "We'll make it through this"

**ADVENT** LUTHERAN CHURCH

777 WYCKOFF AVENUE | WYCKOFF, NJ 07481  
(201) 891-1031 | ADVENTLUTHERANWYCKOFF.ORG

whitewashing. But a story about what it means to have the courage to go on following Jesus in a world that seems to be ever between life and death.

To live in the light of the resurrection is not to act as if these things don't exist or can be undone but to inhabit a world in which we can live as if no degradation keeps us from participating in the divine life. That even in death and its many forms, we are still in relationship with God. That there is no situation that is beyond God's remaking and redemption. That our expectations and horizons are not God's. And even when we look at death in its myriad forms, we know that God is still present on the other side, too. The resurrection doesn't get rid of all of our problems. But it does tell us that there is no situation we encounter that God hasn't entered into before us. There's no time when we can't move forward together.

That going forward isn't easy. It's easier to give into cynicism about the world. It's easier to think that things only become important when they affect our own lives. It's easier to just want to go back to the way things were. Like the women at the tomb, following Jesus out of the Easter garden means living with some mixture of terror and amazement. Sometimes on the same day. Maybe even at the same time. Jesus never promises that living in the light of the resurrection is easy. But he does promise us that it's possible.

Rabbi Hillel once said that you should live as if the world is equally balanced between good and evil, and you should live as if your next action will tip the scale.<sup>1</sup> St. Mark tells us something similar. The world is balanced between life and death, but in his resurrection, Jesus tips the scale.

The world is full of life and death, and we find ourselves filled with terror and amazement. And yet, Christ is risen. The tomb is empty, and the scale is tipped. So follow the risen Christ into the world and flood the path with light.<sup>2</sup>

Joseph Schattauer Paillé, Pastor

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<sup>1</sup> James A. Noel and Matthew V. Johnson, *The Passion of the Lord: African American Reflections* (Fortress Press, 2005), 174.

<sup>2</sup> Augustine.