

Our Triumphant Holy Day
Easter Sunday B, Mark 16:1-8
Grace Church Newton
March 31, 2024

THIS IS A DRAFT TEXT OF THE SERMON. IT MAY VARY FROM THE PRESENTED VERSION. PLEASE EXCUSE TYPOS AND GRAMMATICAL ERRORS, AND DO NOT CITE WITHOUT PERMISSION.

*Alleluia, Christ is risen! **The Lord is risen indeed, alleluia!** Amen.*

Happy Easter, everyone! It is such a joy to be with you this morning! To have passed through this Holy Week together, and now to arrive at this Easter Sunday morning...to proclaim along with all of you, Alleluia, Christ is risen! ***The Lord is risen indeed, alleluia!***

Today is a glorious day. After these past days of immersing ourselves in the parts of our story that happened before that first Easter morning... We've remembered:

- Jesus' conflict with the authorities;
- His agony in the garden as the certainty of his fate caught up to him;
- His betrayal into the hands of those who couldn't comprehend God's vision for this world, the vision that Jesus lived and taught;
- And then his torture and death...

But today, together, we proclaim the surprising, shocking, scandalous, overflowing truth that Jesus is risen, is somehow alive and with us, that through everything – even death – Love abides. Today we celebrate that Love is stronger than cruelty and violence and cynical self-interest. That – in the words of our first hymn this morning – Love is triumphant! And together, today we celebrate that triumph.

Now, I've only been here at Grace for about six months, but you probably know me well enough to know that triumph is not a word that I often use to describe the Christian experience. Indeed, if we as 21st century American Christians have learned anything from Jesus' message of love and care for the least among us, and if we've learned anything from the intervening twenty centuries of historical experience, it is that Christian triumphalism can be a dangerous thing.

And, come to think of it, today's gospel reading from Mark doesn't really end with a sense of triumph, either. It ends with Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome fleeing from the tomb, "[saying] nothing to anyone," we are told, "for they were afraid" [Mark 16:8]. Now, if you opened up a bible and read the ending of the gospel of Mark, you would see that it continues beyond today's final verse – verse 8. But you would also see a

footnote that indicates the scholarly consensus that the original versions of the gospel of Mark finished at this verse. Additional material was added later [Source]. What we read today, this open-ended, uncertain, inconclusive ending – with the women fleeing in fear – this is how most scholars believe the author of Mark concluded this first recorded gospel. With an empty tomb. And an exhortation to go, to tell others how *they* might find Jesus. It's almost as if the author of Mark is saying to readers of this gospel – indeed, is reaching through the centuries and saying to each one of us who hears the gospel today – what will you do now?

The story of Jesus' last week – from his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, to his last evening with his followers, to his death, and now the empty tomb and the promise from the “young man in a white robe” that he is risen – Jesus' last week holds it all. The empty tomb holds it all: the heartache, the grief, the loss, the Love, the faithfulness through it all. It offers a microcosm of the human experience.

Because the world holds it all, too. The crises, the tragedy that is unfolding around the world and right here at home; the sadness and grief that we may be experiencing in our own lives – the triumph of Love is not always the message being sent, the message we receive, the message that sinks in. So today – my own aversion to Christian triumphalism aside – it's important for us to stop, to remind ourselves of the joy.

Our faith can hold it all. Christian community – in its gloriously human imperfection – can hold it all. Today we lift up Love. Today we lift up joy.

So go, celebrate, even in the midst of ALL that world is these days. Even with all that we each hold in our own lives, let's make room for joy. Let's celebrate our “triumphal holy day”:

- Approach our Eucharistic table with songs of thanksgiving.
- Chase after Easter eggs with joyful exuberance.
- Eat lots of chocolate – if chocolate is your thing.
- But most of all, remember that – alongside, intertwined with, inextricably linked to all that the world throws our way – today we celebrate that Love lives.

Our faithful response to the call from the Gospel of Mark, our faithful response to the empty tomb, is to go forth into the world in peace, carrying God's love and joy with us.

Alleluia, Christ is risen! ***The Lord is risen indeed, alleluia!***