

*“The last time Easter fell on April Fools’ Day was in 1956. After 2018, the next one is 2029, and then again in 2040—but after that, not again in this century.”*¹

Message for Easter Sunday 2018 “He is not here, he has been raised—go and tell the others!” Based on Mark 16: 1-8

On this Sunday priests and pastors across the English speaking world proclaim: ‘Alleluia! Christ is risen!’ and their congregations respond: “The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!” And we will repeat this proclamation, in some form or another, every Sunday until the 50 day season of Eastertide ends with Pentecost.

Why? Because we are an Easter People, we are people of the resurrection. This is the most basic tenant of our faith, the foundation of our faith, in fact. How can we proclaim this with such assurance, with such fervour and belief? Because we believe in Jesus; his life, death and his especially, his resurrection. Christians believe that in death is a new life in Christ. How come? Because, based on the writings and teaching of Christians who came before us, we know how the story goes! This amazing story of God’s love for us in Jesus has been shared for generations, first by word of mouth, later written and studied and debated and shared over again and again. Jesus ‘was crucified, died and was buried. ... On the third day he rose again.’ We almost drone it off each time we say the Apostle’s Creed. For Christians this is a ‘fait accompli’, that’s what Jesus did for us. It’s such a part of our religious history that we, well, almost take it for granted.

So it’s really hard for us to fully understand what the women at the tomb might have felt when they found Jesus’ tomb occupied by a strange man in white, and Jesus’ body gone. Like an April Fool’s joke done in extremely poor taste. The shock would have been overwhelming, don’t you think? This shock factor, I think is the impact Mark is giving his readers, enticing them to put themselves in the shoes of Mary Magdalene, Salome and Mary mother of James.

They were there at the foot of the cross, they saw him die, knew where his body was laid to rest. They witnessed the “crucified, died and was buried” part, but the ‘and he rose again’ part? Well—not so much, they were the first ones at the empty grave. So, their role was to be witnesses to the resurrection — and then to go and tell what they witnessed. We read that their response was one of terror, fear, amazement, and then silence. Which, if you give it some thought, would be quite understandable. Who would have believed them anyway?

Have you ever wondered what it might have been like to have lived at the time of Jesus; to have been one of his followers? Let’s imagine! For three years Mary Magdalene, Salome and Mary mother of James were been part of the group of women who have been following and taking care of this unusual and remarkable Rabbi. They came to believe that the way he interpreted and taught the scriptures, while radical, was really the way to follow God. And the things Jesus does -- are well, nothing short of miraculous! Nor is he afraid to stand up for the people no one else cares about, the beggars, the poor, the so-called unclean ones, the sick, the lonely, the mentally ill—the people who live on the fringes. He treats women like they’re just as worthy as the men! He’s forgiving of all those who come to him in true

¹ <https://www.christiancentury.org/article/critical-essay/when-easter-sunday-falls-april-fools-day> Accessed March 27.18

repentance. He's gentle and loving, especially with the children, but he calls a spade a spade. This Rabbi's not afraid to take a stance against the self righteous powerbrokers who use the laws to suit themselves and fill their pockets at the expense of those who have no other recourse. You've got to admire that strength, that passion -- yet you are afraid for him, because it is dangerous in these times to challenge those in power. You have come to really love this man Jesus.

And the follower's worst fears have come to pass. The leaders of the synagogue finally did it; they convinced the Roman authorities to crucify him, which is what Romans did to convicted rebels against the establishment. And the women disciples were there, and watched him die. How could Jesus have let this happen to him? Most of the men left and went home, scared and mortified, but the small group of women disciples followed Joseph of Arimathea who took Jesus off the cross and laid his body to rest Friday night.

The Sabbath was a day of rest, and now, it's daybreak on Sunday morning. The women, with heavy hearts, head back to the tomb carrying the bags laden with spices, wondering how they get into the tomb, but the rock has been moved, who would have done that? Imagine their thinking, the first thought comes unbidden: 'Well, that's handy; we don't need to worry about moving *that* now.' Followed very quickly by: What's going on here, who moved the rock, and why? Slowly, carefully, they enter the tomb. And there's a *living* man sitting there! All dressed in white, -- and he's not Jesus! Their minds racing, they're scared, who is this guy? What's he doing here? And where's our Lord? The events of the past three days come back, overwhelming them. Shock sets in, they start shaking.

And the man in white says: "Don't be alarmed", he tells them. Really? Don't be alarmed? They're in a grave and a living man dressed in white is talking to them! "You're looking for Jesus, who was crucified, He has been raised, He is not here. Look over there, that's where they laid him."

This is too much to process. What does that man mean, Jesus has been raised? Memories of things Jesus said to them, tried to tell them about his pending death, flash through their minds, they're minds straining to understand. The women lean back against the wall of the tomb for support -- Jesus knew this was coming didn't he? Maybe they remember Jesus calling Lazarus back to life. And what was it he said about tearing down the temple and building it up again in three days....?

That man in white is talking again, what's he saying? "Now go and tell the others, especially Peter. Jesus is going ahead of you to Galilee, you'll see him there." And the women flee from the tomb, in terror and amazement -- speechless. No wonder! First they have an encounter with an angel. And the news he gives them! Their Lord, whom they saw crucified really isn't dead, but risen again and he wants us to risk our lives and go and tell everyone? Really? And right here is where Mark's accounting of the resurrection ends. But we know the resurrection story gets told; the women must have overcome their trepidation and shared the good news of their Lord being raised from the dead.

Mark's gospel is the first one to be written after the resurrection. Scholars posit that maybe that's why scribes over the years may well have added "proper" endings for this gospel. If you look up Mark's gospel in most bibles you will see that two other endings have been written. But for today, the tomb is empty, "Jesus is risen, go and tell the others", the messenger in white tells the women. Our gospel reading is a true cliff-hanger. It's like Mark is prompting the readers to take this further, challenging them to figure out just what does a resurrected Jesus mean?

What does it mean to believe that Jesus, the Messiah, the one come to save the world is alive, and well and with us always;

What does it mean to believe that death is not the final event of our lives, that there truly is life after death?

What does it mean to believe that the evil and cruelty of the world cannot overcome the goodness, the love and will of God, that the darkness cannot and will not overcome the light, even when it feels overwhelmingly like the dark side is winning, and that all that is good and loving has been lost? So the question for each of us is what difference does this make for all of us, how does that change our lives?

And how do we witness the resurrected Christ in our lives; who do we go and tell?

Alleluia, Christ is risen.

The Lord is risen indeed, Alleluia.