



Easter Day

Sermon by Ven Moses Thabethe



Sunday 4 April 2021

READINGS

Romans 6:3-11; Psalm 114; Mark 16:1-8

Easter Homily

About 6 six weeks ago, when we opened church for in-person worship, at the beginning of Lent, we started what looked like a hopeless, unending and sorrowful journey. We journeyed with Christ into the wilderness during Lent – an uncomfortable place of sacrifice and struggle. I mentioned then that both metaphorically and realistically, our wilderness journey began a year ago in March 2020 with the dawn of COVID-19, and we have not quite managed to find the way out of it yet. Indeed, our wilderness journeys sometimes last a long while!

But in this night, in a cosmic sense, we have come to a joyful end of that journey. A journey that began sorrowfully has ended joyfully. The darkness that enveloped the world eventually gives way to the light that overcomes it. I am talking about the Christ-Event, the life, death and resurrection of Christ. On this Day we celebrate what God has done throughout history to bring salvation to all humanity and to redeem the entire creation. We began our celebration tonight with a service of light, which symbolized Jesus rising from the dead, and bringing light to all of us. The light of Christ has shone in the world scattering darkness forever.

And so in our scripture on this Easter Sunday we read the account of the resurrection from both Mark and John. It is rather ironic but significant that in both gospel stories, women are at center stage and, they are the ones challenged to be the first messengers of the “great commission” to go and tell the world about the good news of the resurrection. Three women, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome – women who would have travelled with Jesus, supported his ministry and that of the 12 disciples - come to the tomb, devastated and probably in a state of desolation, for the one in whom they had placed their hope, was now dead. Although their world had collapsed, they- like countless mourners before and after them came to give their beloved friend and teacher one last act of love, to anoint and embalm his body. One can imagine that they must have felt powerless as they looked toward a future without him. They ask among themselves: “Who will roll away the stone for us?”

But, to their astonishment, the stone had been rolled away, and the angelic messenger reminds them of Jesus’ prophetic words (“Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. 16:7 But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you) and so the angel challenged them to look ahead with boldness, letting go of the shackles of death and to claim the resurrection life. Stunned, they don’t know what to do next. The reality of the Resurrection needs to sink

in before they can tell anyone else. In John's Gospel, the story is slightly different: It is Mary Magdalene who comes alone to the tomb, discovers the empty tomb and runs to Peter and John with an improbable story – Jesus' body has disappeared. Like Mary and Salome, she too is unnerved by the empty tomb and returns, grief-stricken, believing at first that Jesus' body has been taken from the tomb. These three women, while unsure how all this will work, they are, however, determined to finish their undertaking. Ultimately they too are entrusted with the responsibility of being bearers of good news to the world. That is our task too.

Throughout scripture, we encountered many who were called to this task. Peter bears witness in the house of a Gentile centurion; Paul bears witness to his fledgling church communities; those who ate and drank with a risen Lord bear witness to what they have seen and heard; the disciples once on Jesus' side, then fleeing from him are witnesses to the love and forgiveness that gives them a fresh start; angels gather at the tomb to bear witness that he is not here, he is risen; from the Old Testament the Psalmist bears witness to the saving hand of God for those who suffer and are lost; while Isaiah draws the nations to Mount Zion to a place where the past is forgiven and all are joined together in one celebration, where they witness the love and generosity of God.

In the letter to the Romans which we heard tonight Paul wrote that we will imitate Christ in his resurrection (Rom 6:5 "For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his." What is the story to which we bear witness today? Where are the signs of newness of life and hope or the longing for those things that yearn for? What have we received that we pass on to others? And how do we become witnesses – is it in words only or actions? How would we define or explain the resurrection?

What we learn from this story is that resurrection is not to be told or understood by standing and staring into the tomb. It is to be lived by turning and running back into life, however hard it may be at this time. It is by always remembering the promise of the resurrection and living it out in our lives—as we encounter new people and situations, or the same old people and situations. It is living in hope that the tomb is not God's final message to us.

Therefore, every day you and I decide to live our life in faith and not in fear, we are fulfilling the ending of this gospel. Every day we share God's love with a fellow human being, we are continuing to write the Jesus story in the world.

As Keith and Krystin Getty write in their Resurrection hymn:

*Where doubt and darkness once had been,
They saw Him and their hearts believed.
But blessed are those who have not seen,
Yet, sing hallelujah.*

*Once bound by fear now bold in faith,
They preached the truth and power of grace.
And pouring out their lives they gained
Life, life everlasting.*

*The power that raised Him from the grave
Now works in us to powerfully save.
He frees our hearts to live His grace;
Go tell of His goodness.*

Christ is Risen! He is Risen indeed, O Sing Halleluia!