

John Sampson
"The Great Work"
Text: Mark 16:1 - 8
Preached at KVCC
April 1, 2018 – Easter

Will you pray with me?

God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you our rock and our redeemer.

Amen.

Alleluia!

Happy Easter!

Christ is risen!

This morning, this morning of all mornings, when the newly risen sun has banished the darkness, and we hear that death itself is overthrown, we shout out our alleluias, because we have so much to be thankful for.

This morning we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus, the one we call the Christ. Where the world said “No!” to his message of love and compassion, God has said “Yes!” Where the world said “No!” to Jesus’ example of eating with all of his neighbors, including prostitutes and tax collectors, and the impure, God has said “Yes!” Where the world said no to blessing the poor and the weak and the grieving, God has said “Yes!”

That is why we say “Alleluia!” this morning.

God has said “Yes!” by raising her chosen one, and proclaiming that Jesus’ message and example will never be silenced by the grave, and

that he will live forever in our hearts, and in our lives. God has said “Yes!” on this Easter morning by raising all that is good, and right, and beautiful in humanity, and showing us that these things will never die.

That is why we shout “Alleluia!” today.

This morning we celebrate because Love and Life have triumphed in the face of the brokenness and cruelty of the cross. This morning we can celebrate because God has shown us the most radical vision of hope – that Love and Life can be reborn not just once upon a time, but also within our lives, within our imperfect and messy human lives, right here and right now.

That is why we proclaim “Alleluia!” this morning.

There is so much to be thankful for this Easter, and yet, it may have seemed like the story we heard read from the gospel of Mark was a discordant note in the symphony of wonder and joy that is this moment.

The story may have seemed out of tune because instead of ending with proclamation, it ends in silence. Instead of ending in joy, it ends in fear.

It starts out simply enough. Jesus' female friends and followers – the two Marys and Salome – rise early to travel to Jesus' tomb to prepare his corpse with spices. It's an act of love and faithfulness for them to do this for the man who was their teacher, and their hope. They come to that tomb expecting to find it sealed, and Jesus' corpse lying within.

But instead of finding the expected, God delivers an existential shock. For the tomb is already open, and instead of finding Jesus' corpse, they meet a man dressed in white. And before they can even accuse the man of vandalizing the tomb, and stealing the body he speaks.

And he tells them something that stuns them, that makes their legs go weak. He tells them that Jesus is not there because he has been raised!

He has been raised!

And not only that, but he is gone on to Galilee and will meet them all there, just like he told them he would.

The man dressed in white tells the Marys and Salome to go and tell all the disciples what has happened.

And then something amazing occurs. The women flee, and they are so frightened that they don't say anything to anyone. This is a BIG deal in the gospel of Mark, because in Mark everyone tells everyone else everything, even when they are sworn to secrecy. But here, at the moment it matters most, these three women bite their tongues, and run away.

Psalm 40 opens by telling us that God performs deeds of great power and wonder, sometimes out in the world, but more often in ordinariness of our own lives. And that many will see these deeds, and that they won't break out into joy or thanksgiving or alleluias, but will respond by shuddering in fear.

The Psalmist says, "Many will see. Many will see and fear."

I think that is what has happened to these women – to the two Marys and Salome. They become afraid and run away and keep silent because they believe they have come into contact with God's great power.

They begin to believe in God's great power by seeing the stone to the tomb rolled away.

They begin to believe in God's great power because they meet God's messenger – who looks like a human and is dressed in white.

They begin to believe in God's great power because they look into that tomb and Jesus' body is missing.

They begin to believe in God's great power because they remember all of those odd things Jesus used to tell them about how he would die, and yet how death wouldn't be the end.

And I think those three women begin to ask themselves within their hearts if what they are witnessing could actually be true. And I think that it scares them to their core, that their hair stands up on end, that they get goose pimples all over their bodies, and then they run. Not to find Jesus. Not to tell the disciples. But to escape from a truth that is slowly coming into focus, a truth that is simply too big to believe, a truth that tells them that all of the assumptions of their lives are now suspect.

But that is not where the story ends, because now the perspective flips. Instead of considering the women, we are invited to look into our hearts, and ask ourselves questions that may shatter the most tightly held beliefs we have about our lives, and who we are.

How will you greet the news of this Easter morning?

How will you live after you have come into the presence of God's power?

How will you respond to hearing that Jesus is not here, but has gone out before us?

What difference will it make to your life that love and humanity have triumphed over brokenness and death?

Will you run away from this Easter morning, telling no one what you have heard out of fear?

Or will you run towards the Easter sunrise shouting alleluias, and giving great thanks for what God has done in Jesus, and what God is doing right now in your life?

Only you can answer these questions. But it is my Easter prayer that you will not respond to God's invitation with the world's "No!" but with God's eternal "Yes!"

Alleluia!

Happy Easter!

Christ is risen!

Amen!