

Isaiah 25:6-9
Mark 16:1-8

Easter Sunday
April 1, 2018
Midway Presbyterian Church

He Is Not Here

Introduction to the Old Testament Lesson

Our lesson from Isaiah is one of the rare Old Testament texts containing an explicit promise of the destruction of death. It is cited by Paul in his discussion of resurrection in 1 Corinthians (15:5). The second half of verse 8 is quoted in Revelation to describe how every tear will be wiped away in the coming Kingdom of God. Listen to these words from Isaiah 25:6-9...

Introduction to the Gospel Lesson

In our Gospel Lesson for today we meet three women who have gone to the tomb of Jesus to anoint his body with spices. What they find there is nothing like what they had expected. Listen to these words from Mark 16:1-8...

Sermon

Jesus, the Rabbi of such promise, has been crucified, dead, and buried. The carpenter of Nazareth—master maker of men, vigorous young leader, who had come, not be served, but to serve; who had healed many who were beyond healing, given sight to the blind, voice to those who could not speak, hearing to the deaf; who had taught and preached and practiced what he preached—he is buried now in a borrowed tomb.

Is this then the end of the story? The story that for Mark had begun this way:

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. (1:1)

Is this the end of the good news of Jesus Christ? A brief and captivating episode in human history, wondrous but over—crucified, dead, and buried.

Once the Sabbath was over at sundown on Saturday evening, the women could buy spices for the delayed embalming of the body of Jesus after sunrise on Sunday morning. Mark says that early on that Sunday morning, on their way to the tomb they asked, “who will roll away the huge stone for us?” And to their amazement, they find that the stone has already been rolled back. They enter the tomb and find not the body of Jesus, but a young man (traditionally understood to be an angel) who informs them that Jesus is not here, he has been raised from the dead, and that they are to go and tell the disciples and Peter that Jesus is going ahead of them to Galilee. And there they will see him, just as he had told them.

Therefore the story is *not* over. He’s not here! Don’t look for him in the tomb—he has been raised from the dead. No, the Carpenter of Nazareth is not in the grave; he’s back in the shop, repairing lives, ready to help us make a life of purpose and joy. That message brings a dramatic reversal to an otherwise sad narrative which had seemed to end in the abandonment and death of the Son of God. Looking among the dead for the One crucified, the women are assured that they are looking in the wrong place. “The place where they laid him” is empty. To see Jesus, the women and the disciples must look ahead.

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.” (v. 7)

My friends, this is the message of Easter to our despairing world. He is not in the tomb. He has been raised. Even if you are in a decaying situation, if life is deteriorating and dying about you, remember that God is the one who can bring new life. Look to him as the living Lord.

It’s a word we need to hear, in the midst of news about terrorists killing innocent people. Of deranged young men shooting students and teachers. Of seemingly unending hatred and killing the Middle East. Of political leaders and a country divided on just about everything.

Each Sunday we affirm that on the third day Jesus rose again from the grave, he ascended into heaven. Jesus is not here. He sits at the right hand of God. But he is also with us. Through the Holy Spirit Jesus is with his people in time of need.

A man in a Texas town was known to be the meanest man around. But he had a little girl whom he adored. When his daughter became sick and died, the man's heart was broken. At the funeral the preacher read about David who said, "I cannot bring the child back, but I can go to him." (2 Sam. 12:23) This mean man decided that he would do just that. He turned his back upon sin and sought and found the Savior. Afterward he said, "It was in the valley of the shadow that I found Christ for my soul and peace for my heart."

I read the story of a man who died, and the preacher called at the home and tried to comfort the stricken wife. As he left the home, he felt that he had not helped her very much. When he returned to his study, he opened his Bible to the twenty-third Psalm and read it again. And new meaning came to him from the verse: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me." The thought came to him that we don't stop in the valley, but that God takes us "through the valley." So he went back to the home with this assurance in his heart and was able to bring comfort to the sorrowing woman. Friends, you may go down into the valley, but Jesus will be there with you. He will not leave you there. He will bring you through the dark valley and out into sunlight of renewed life.

Upon hearing those words of the angel about Jesus not being there in the tomb, Mark says that the women fled with awe and fear. What God has done in the life and death of Jesus and what God will do in the future fills them with wonder. They had come to the tomb to pay their last respects by anointing his body. But the normal patterns of life and death do not hold on this early morning.

For God has raised Jesus from the dead. God has undone the power of death. God has altered the rules of the known world. The women were speechless. Holy astonishment, awe, fear, and silence are surely appropriate in the face of such wonder.

He is not here. He has been raised. He is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you. This is the angel's message to the astonished women. Galilee is where Jesus began his ministry, and where it will begin anew. Jesus is not in the tomb. It is empty. He is on the move again.

My friends, the good news is that Jesus goes before us and will be with us day by day, enabling us to face and deal with all that is dangerous, difficult, or painful. All who labor and are heavy laden are invited to come unto him and find rest. And he has prepared a place for us in heaven—a room with our name on it. In a house not made with hands, but eternal in the heavens. There he will lighten the way, take us by the hand, wipe away every tear, and assure us that death will be no more. No more sorrow or suffering. No more sickness and pain. The present suffering that we know is nothing compared to the coming glory to be revealed to us (Romans 8:18).

Precious Lord, take my hand,
Lead me on, let me stand,
I am tired, I am weak, I am worn;
Through the storm, through the night.
Lead me on to the Light.

Take my hand, precious Lord.
Lead me home.

~Tommy Dorsey

I'd like to close with this story from the book, *Chicken Soup for the Christian Soul* (Jack Canfield, *et. al.*):

Jeremy was born with a twisted body, a slow mind and a chronic, terminal illness that had been slowly killing him all his young life. Still, his parents had tried to give him as normal a life as possible.

At the age of 12, Jeremy was only in second grade, seemingly unable to learn. His teacher, Doris Miller, often became exasperated with him. He would squirm in his seat, drool and make grunting noises. At other times, he spoke clearly and distinctly, as if a spot of light had penetrated the darkness of his brain.

Most of the time, however, Jeremy irritated his teacher. In a conversation with his parents the teacher explained that Jeremy really belonged in a special school. It wasn't fair to him to be in a class with younger children who had no learning problems....It wasn't fair to keep him in her class. She had 18 other youngsters to teach and Jeremy was a distraction. Furthermore, he would never learn to read or write. Why waste any more time trying?

As she pondered the situation, guilt washed over her. "Oh God," she said aloud, "here I am complaining when my problems are nothing compared with that poor family! Please help me to be more patient with Jeremy."

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Spring came, and the children talked excitedly about the coming of Easter. Doris told them the story of Jesus, and then to emphasize the idea of new life springing forth, she gave each of the children a large plastic egg. "Now," she said to them, "I want you to take this home and bring it back tomorrow with something inside that shows new life. Do you understand?"

Yes, Miss Miller!" the children responded enthusiastically - all except for Jeremy. He just listened intently, his eyes never leaving her face. He did not even make his usual noises. Had he understood what she had said about Jesus' death and resurrection? Did he understand the assignment?

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The next morning, 19 children came to school, laughing and talking as they placed their eggs in the large wicker basket on Miss Miller's desk. After they completed their math lesson, it was time to open the eggs. In the first egg, Miss Miller found a flower. "Oh yes, a flower is certainly a sign of new life," she said. "When plants peek through the ground we know that spring is here." A small girl in the first row waved her arms. "That's my egg, Miss Miller," she called out.

The next egg contained a plastic butterfly, which looked very real. The teacher held it up. "We all know that a caterpillar changes and grows into a beautiful butterfly. Yes, that is new life, too." Little Judy smiled proudly and said, "Miss Miller, that one is mine."

Next Doris found a rock with moss on it. She explained that the moss, too, showed life. Billy spoke up from the back of the classroom. "My Daddy helped me!" he beamed.

Then Doris opened the fourth egg. She gasped. The egg was empty! Surely it must be Jeremy's, she thought, and, of course, he did not understand her instructions....Because she did not want to embarrass him, she quietly set the egg aside and reached for another.

Suddenly Jeremy spoke up. "Miss Miller, aren't you going to talk about my egg?" Flustered, Doris replied, "but Jeremy - your egg is empty!" He looked into her eyes and said softly, "Yes, but Jesus' tomb was empty too!"

Time stopped. When she could speak again. Doris asked him, "Do you know why the tomb was empty?"

"Oh yes!" Jeremy exclaimed. "Jesus was killed and put in there. Then his Father raised him up!"

The recess bell rang. While the children excitedly ran out to the school yard, Doris cried. The cold inside her melted completely away.

Three months later Jeremy died. Those who paid their respects at the mortuary were surprised to see 19 plastic eggs on top of his casket, all of them empty.

If we can receive and cherish the good news of the empty tomb, the good news of the resurrection. If we can hold this truth in our hearts and minds, and seek to live a life of trust, that would be the greatest form of gratitude and faith—to live worthy lives, lives worthy of the Good News of the Gospel and the Kingdom come in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ our Lord.

Amen and Amen.