

The Great Vigil of Easter  
30 March, 2024  
Grace, Muncie  
The Rev. Dr. Paul Jacobson, *Rector*

*Romans 6:3-11*

*Psalm 114*

*Mark 16:1-8*

*Alleluia! Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!*

Tonight, we hear Mark's blunt, open-ended account of the morning of the resurrection. The young man in the white robe says, "He has been raised; he is not here." And the women who had brought spices to the tomb fled, and "said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid."

This feels like a different kind of Easter. There's no Jesus and Mary Magdalene in the garden. There's no Jesus at all. There is just an empty tomb. What might we learn from this unsettling account that feels incomplete? Let's step back a bit to see what we might see.

In the darkness on the third day after their rabbi's execution, three women check one last time to make sure they have everything they need. Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome have gathered spices, so that they might go and anoint the body of Jesus – to offer him a proper Jewish burial.

From the start, they knew that this might be a fool's errand. The text tells us that, as they went, they asked themselves, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" They knew they didn't have the strength to budge that stone on their own.

Mark then tells us that when the women looked up, they saw that the stone had already been rolled back. I always thought this meant that they had been looking down at the ground as they made their way to the tomb – and then they looked up.

But the Greek verb that Mark uses here [*ἀναβλέπω* *anablepo*] can also mean that the women looked again. The women come upon the tomb and, as they expected, the stone is still blocking the entrance. They don't stand a chance of getting near Jesus' body on their own. Then they look again, or perhaps they do a double take, and realize that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled away.

This isn't the first case of looking again, of seeing again, in Mark's gospel. In chapter 8 (vv. 22-25) and in chapter 10 (vv. 46-52), Jesus healed the blind, allowing them to see again. The verb Mark uses in those stories is the same one used with the women at the tomb, to see again [*anablepo*]. In the healing stories, there is a sense in which spiritual healing allowed the blind to recover physical sight.

In Mark's Gospel, faith gives us the ability to see the world as God sees it. Those of you who wear bifocals will understand this metaphor. When we look out of one part

of our glasses, through the eyes of the world, we see obstacles; who will roll the stone away? But when we look up, when we look again, using the other part of our glasses, the eyes of faith, we begin to see that God has already removed the obstacles.

Mary and Mary and Salome came to the tomb thinking that their story with Jesus had ended, blocked by a stone they had no chance of moving on their own. And yet, when they look up, when they look again through the eyes of faith, they see that the stone has already been rolled away. The Greek here is in the perfect tense. The stone that had been an obstacle is already long gone when they do an Easter double take and begin to see the world as God sees it.

When they arrive, they hear a breathtaking announcement that Christ has been raised from the dead and is no longer there but waiting for them in Galilee. It's no wonder they were dumbfounded. Mark tells us that *they went out and fled the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.*

They experienced Easter as a thing, a noun, but they said nothing to anyone because they were afraid. They had not yet experienced Easter as a verb. They would need to look up again.

Easter as a verb? In the mid-1870s, the English Jesuit priest and poet Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote, "Let him Easter in us."<sup>1</sup> Using the noun Easter as a verb, Hopkins writes, "Let him Easter in us, be a dayspring to the dimness of us."

Such a splendid phrase, such a beautiful prayer, "Let him Easter in us." Let Easter get into us. Let Easter come and live where we live. Let Easter not fill just our hearts, but permeate our souls Let Easter be a dayspring to the dimness of us.

Isn't that really what we are saying by gathering here tonight? Not simply to remember Easter as a noun, a long-ago event. But, rather, to celebrate Easter as a verb, something that transforms our present lives, something that gives us new life now, something that gives us hope and meaning and courage today. Isn't that the longing of every human heart? To let Jesus Easter in us? But what does this mean? We need to look up again.

Philips Brooks, an Episcopal bishop and author in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, put it this way, "The great Easter truth is not that we are to live newly after death – that is not the great thing. The great thing is that we are to live nobly now because we are to live forever."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *The Wreck of the Deutschland* is a 35-stanza ode by Gerard Manley Hopkins with Christian themes, composed in 1875 and 1876, though not published until 1918. The poem depicts the shipwreck of the SS *Deutschland*. Among those killed in the shipwreck were five Franciscan nuns forced to leave Germany by the Falk Laws; the poem is dedicated to their memory.

<sup>2</sup> This is a paraphrase. I am unable to find the actual source/

Talk about looking up! For many of us, this changes everything! N.T. Wright, an English New Testament scholar and Anglican bishop, takes up the theme. He writes,

please note that the resurrection stories in the Gospels do not say Jesus is raised, therefore we're going to heaven or therefore we're going to be raised. They say Jesus is raised, therefore, God's new creation has begun and we've got a job to do."<sup>3</sup>

Bishop Wright goes on,

"The point of the resurrection...is that the present bodily life is not valueless just because it will die...What you do with your body in the present matters because God has a great future in store for it...What you do in the present—by painting, preaching, singing, sewing, praying, teaching, building hospitals, digging wells, campaigning for justice, writing poems, caring for the needy, loving your neighbor as yourself—will last into God's future. These activities are not simply ways of making the present life a little less beastly, a little more bearable, until the day when we leave it behind altogether (as the hymn so mistakenly puts it...). They are part of what we may call building for God's kingdom."<sup>4</sup>

The other three gospels and history tell us that the women eventually did experience Easter as a verb, because they did go and tell the other disciples that Christ had been raised from the dead. Jesus Eastered in them and they were transformed from a group of terrified people to apostles who went forth boldly to proclaim that in the resurrection God had trampled down death by death.

So, my friends in Christ, what about us? If we practice looking up, looking again, we will see little pockets of Eastering all around you...maybe even in the mirror. Right now, at this moment, we can let go of past hurts and grudges, and start over. Right here, right now, we can overcome our fear of and fixation on death and trust in the Lord of life and love. Right here, right now, wherever we are, we can claim new life in our families, in our jobs, in our relationships, in our churches, and in this broken but beautiful world. We can be new here and now by the power of the resurrection.

God's new creation has begun, and we've got a job to do, with joy. We can let Easter get into us; we can let Easter come and live where we live; we can let Easter permeate our souls. We can let Jesus Easter in us, and be a dayspring to the dimness of us.

*Alleluia! Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!*

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<sup>3</sup> From John Dominic Crossan & N.T. Wright, *Resurrection of Jesus*.

<sup>4</sup> N.T. Wright, [\*Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church\*](#).