

## Scripture and Sermon for April 5, 2015 Easter Sunday

### Mark 16:1-8

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. They had been saying to one another, 'Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?' When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, '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. 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.' So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

## **Acts 10:34-43**

Then Peter began to speak to them: 'I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all. That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.'

Let us pray...Amen.

Have you ever experienced a moment in your life when you were overwhelmed? When you were confronted with circumstances that were nearly impossible to comprehend, and all you could think to say was *what now?*

I suspect that this is a part of being human, that most of us come to a *what now* moment more often than we would like to admit. And while we may all be familiar with the feeling, with the frustration, with the fear and anger that comes with a *what now* moment, it probably doesn't compare with what Mary Magdalene, Salome, and Mary the mother of James and Jesus must have felt that first Easter morning.

Already rocked with the reality of Jesus' arrest, trial, torture, crucifixion, and death, they did the only thing they knew to do, which was follow tradition: anoint the body according to their custom and their faith.

Worried about how they were going to move the stone that covered the entrance to the tomb, they were determined to bring some order and some ritual to a circumstance that was out of their control. They intended to find some relief in preparing Jesus' body, and when they arrived at the tomb, they found the stone already rolled away. *What now?*

When they entered the tomb, a young man dressed in white was there, and he told them: 'Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. *What now?*

It was too much. The young man dressed in white had told them to not be alarmed, but in the face of all that had happened, how could they not be alarmed? In the face of the unthinkable, they thought they had come up with a way to reassure themselves, a way to practice their faith that would bring some comfort from the pain and fear and the anger. *What now?*

The Gospel says that terror and amazement seized them. I can understand why. Perhaps you can too.

As I was contemplating this whole *what now* idea, it occurred to me that I've personally experienced several different *kinds* of *what now* moments. For those of you who know me, and my journey into ministry, you know that I lost two jobs in a fairly short time, and as I tried to understand what was going on, I asked *what now?* And while the answer was not immediately forthcoming, my entrance into seminary was the answer to that question. Perhaps some of you, too, have experienced the loss of a job, and found yourselves asking, *what now?*

Issues of health loom large for many of us...and sometimes it seems as though our bodies conspire to hit us with a series of health issues at the same time! We all have our particular maladies, being human and all. At the very least, even the most healthy among us find ourselves aging, and dealing with all the things that go with an aging body. *What now?*

Ever had a *what now* moment dealing with a large and impersonal institution, like an insurance company, or a hospital, or a school, or a government agency? I know that it seems small compared to

what Mary, Salome, and Mary went through, but when we're in the midst of our own personal crisis, it feels as if there is no relief.

In our grief, in our mourning, even in our loss over a loved one, we often come to a *what now* moment. Rarely can we avoid being alarmed, rarely do we find comfort in those painful moments.

In exasperation, anger, or resignation, we ask *what now* of God, and rarely does an answer come immediately...in time, maybe, yes, but when we want the answer *now*, we are often left to sit in our terror and in our amazement at what we are experiencing.

But I say to you this Easter morning, take heart! I echo the young man dressed in white in the tomb, who said: do not be alarmed! The good news is that while we've all been stuck in *what now* moments, times when we weren't sure how to respond, when we weren't sure what to do, or what was coming next, the fact that we are here today means that we survive those moments. Sometimes we even grow from them!

Our God is a big enough God to receive our anger, to feel our grief, to acknowledge our not so subtle insinuations that maybe this one time, God really *did* give us more than we can handle...

The mystery and the miracle of the resurrection tells us that no matter how many *what now* moments we have in our lives, God is with us. We need not be alarmed. We need not be afraid, even of death itself. No matter how many *what now* moments we have in our lives, God has an answer to that question.

Terror and amazement are pretty big feelings. So is anger, and resignation, and helplessness. We may try and follow custom, or

tradition to comfort ourselves, but it isn't until we get to the *what now* moment that we're ready to face whatever comes next.

Jesus himself gave us a clue at the last supper, when he commanded the disciples, and us, to love each other as he has loved us. *Even when we are screaming what now in our silent prayers.*

What now? Give love, and receive love. What now? Forgive, and be forgiven. What now? Accept, and be accepted. Feed and be fed, clothe and be clothed, visit and be visited. The mystery and miracle of following Jesus on the Way, the path, is that we can be doing these things even as we desperately ask *what now?* Even as we angrily ask *what now?* Even as we ask *what now* in exasperation. Some of us might be living in *what now* moments even as we speak!

In the terrifying moments after discovering the empty tomb, there was no comfort for Mary, Salome, and Mary. But in time, with reflection and prayer, and with the unfolding of their lives, I believe they came to be comforted in the Christ's resurrection. They came to understand their own role in that mystery.

In the terrifying moments of our own lives, it can seem as if there is no comfort for us, no relief, no antidote for what disturbs us. But in time, with reflection and prayer, and with the unfolding of our lives, I believe we can be comforted in the Christ's resurrection, and that we can come to a better understanding of our own role in that mystery.

At Easter time, we surround ourselves with images of resurrection: blooming flowers after a brutal winter, butterflies

after what looks like the death of a cocoon, bread that has risen with the blessing of yeast, and yet, we often forget to look at the images of resurrection that we carry in our own lives. Healing after illness or injury, recovery after addiction, love after rejection, laughter after tears, strength and resolve after anxiety and fear.

He is risen indeed, and we need not be alarmed. What we *do* need to do is to ask *what now?* Amen.