

Sermon Easter 2018B: Jesus is Alive! He's Seeking You! He's Calling You!

Introduction: God Has Spoken Once and for all His Word of Love

He is risen!

The Lord Jesus is risen,

And the world and our lives are changed forever or they could be!

God has written a different ending to the story of the cross by raising Jesus from the dead

Your sins, my sins, our sins have been wiped away by Jesus' sacrifice;

And because they are no more,

We can now enter fully into the life with this holy God who loves us so.

God has turned the story in a completely different direction in raising Jesus from the dead

And death itself as a final word is no more;

Our loved ones, who have died are alive, and we will see them again;

And we, you and I, when we shed these earthly bodies will be alive, too;

Because God in Jesus Christ has destroyed death

Our physical endings will be wrapped in immortality.

On Easter, God has opened the story to new possibilities in raising Jesus from the dead

And Jesus is here this morning, with you and with me;

Jesus is here now, calling us, beckoning us to the dance of real life,

Inviting us to join in the Easter story

By becoming God's Easter people in the world.

For the empty tomb is not something that happened once upon a time;

Not some April Fool's joke, not something to be tucked away

On the dusty pages of some history book;

No, the story goes on, because the risen Lord is here now;

And we will see Him and we will know Him.

And we will have to decide for ourselves if we will be His Easter people in the world

People of grace, people of love, people working with God to change the world.

The Unfinished Story

They were seized with terror and amazement that first Easter

We come to church this morning for the fanfare, the flowers the hymns;

We come to hear again the story of the empty tomb;

We've come to celebrate Jesus' resurrection from the dead,

And bear witness to God's triumph, to God's final word on sin and death;

And the new life available to everyone.

That's Easter Day now,

But that first Easter Day was a very different story for the three women

Who came to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body and to close this chapter of their lives.

These three women, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome;

Have come to the empty tomb thinking that the story of Jesus had come to an end,

That it's all over between Jesus and them.

They loved Jesus; they were His friends; they had seen the miracles, heard the teachings;

They had also seen the agony of Jesus' death on the cross;

Witnessed His lifeless body being taken down and wrapped in a linen shroud;

And had come to the tomb to anoint and to glimpse the body one last time.

And to their utter astonishment and to their great fear they found out that it wasn't over,

They found out that the story between Jesus and them was only beginning.

The stone had been rolled away from the tomb and Jesus wasn't there;

The tomb was empty; empty, except for an angel who told them,

“Jesus has been raised, He is not here;

He is going ahead of you to Galilee and there you will see Him.”

So they went out and fled from the tomb, St. Mark writes with no Easter fanfare

They fled for terror and amazement had seized them;

And they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

And here, according to the most reliable sources, St. Marks' Gospel ends;

It's not the happily ever after close to the story we might expect,
But instead it's one that suggests that there's unfinished business,
It means that there's more to the story.

Now, from a literary standpoint, it makes the reader or the listener

Want to turn back to the first page of St. Mark's Gospel
To see if we we've missed something;
Or to figure what's in Galilee that's so important that Jesus goes ahead of them there.

Well, if you turn to the first page of St. Mark's Gospel, you'll see that he's written,

“The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ the Son of God.”
Ahh, a pretty strong indication that the women didn't stay silent too long;
And that their terror and amazement turned into a new life
Where death was no longer their concern
But only a life lived with God and for the good of others.

And if Galilee is the clue to a better understanding of the mystery of the empty tomb,

Then you'll pretty quickly realize that there in Galilee, there in the world is Jesus;
There is Jesus proclaiming the kingdom of God, teaching them,
Healing them, loving them, Jesus calling them
To live in His way and to invite others to join in.

Either way, the story's not over;

There's unfinished business because Jesus is alive and continues to go before them;
Perhaps that's what frightened the women the most;
The realization that God was not finished with them yet;
And God is not finished with you and me, either.

The Easter message both comforts and challenges us to believe

Not simply that Christ is risen,

But that the beginning of the good news of salvation,

The life with Jesus in Galilee is here and now, here this morning in our own lives

And we must decide for ourselves how the story continues,

And whether we will be God's Easter people in the world.

Three Responses for Continuing the Story: Rejection, Nice, Expectant

Now there are three ways people tend to respond to the Easter message and challenge

Three ways people decide how the story will continue or end with them.

One traditional response is flat out denial; not doubt, but outright denial;

The story of God's boundless love revealed through Jesus' resurrection

Is just too incredible or too ridiculous for us to accept;

There's no terror or amazement, just dismissal of a fanciful story.

Well, for me the evidence says otherwise;

There's more evidence that Jesus rose from the dead

Than a hundred other "historical facts" we take as true with far less evidence.

Part of that evidence is that eleven out of twelve of Jesus' first followers and many others

Went to their death because they knew Jesus was alive

And had allowed the story of God's love to continue through them;

And I have to ask you, "who would die for a lie?"

Another popular response to Jesus' resurrection is what I call safe acceptance

We accept the truth that Jesus rose from the dead;

It's a comforting thought to know that we can be forgiven

And that there may be something on the other side of the door of death.

But we're not looking for the story to continue in our lives in any real way;

In any way that would propel us into a different way of living;

Perhaps the terror and amazement that would come in changing our lives

Is too much for us to consider and we're pretty comfortable with our lives right now.

But if Jesus rose from the dead, if Jesus is alive, and we believe this amazing Easter story

Then we need to start looking for Him;

Then we need to start opening our lives to Him because if it's true,

Then we can no longer live our lives as if He doesn't matter

We must let the story continue through us in some way of God's choosing.

Not opening our lives to Jesus and allowing the story to continue through us;

Terror and amazement aside at the changes that might come to our lives

Would be like having the winning power ball ticket

And putting it away safely in some drawer without ever redeeming it.

Which brings me to the third response to the Easter message,

The response that set the world on fire nearly two thousand years ago

And still does today.

Jesus' resurrection reintroduced the presence, the forgiveness, the peace,

And the love of God into a world just like ours today;

The resurrection releases God's power and purpose

Into a world crying out for another way,

A world crying out for love and acceptance and justice and peace;

Crying out for an Easter people who live the story of God's love in their everyday lives;

Whatever terrors and challenges come their way.

It's a way of life that expects to encounter Jesus along the way

The most amazing way of living each day as though Jesus' resurrection matters

And a way of life that recognizes that you and I have been called,

To allow the story to take hold in our lives

By allowing the presence and love of God to direct us and transform us

To make us His Easter people;

Recreating us as people who matter and live and make a difference for the good of others.

Continuing the Story

Jesus is risen!

The Lord Jesus is risen and the world and our lives don't have to be the same;

We've been empowered by the resurrection and have work to do.

And so I invite you today and every day to let the story continue in you;

I invite you to seek the presence of the Risen One in your own life;

To live in the hope and expectation that He will come to you;

And empower you to live each day as an Easter person;

And most importantly I invite you to live a life that is really life

A life that matters to God and a life that matters and makes a difference in the world.

There may be a little terror and amazement at the work that is before us as Easter people;

But since Christ is alive, we can be confident that He is with us always;

Loving is, guiding us and empowering us;

And the world will be changed by our witness to Easter.

Amen.