

## **Easter Sermon 2021B: Living and Telling the Good News of Easter**

### **Introduction: A Long Lent**

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

Of all the statements and promises made since the beginning of the world;

Of all the events that have taken place since the beginning of creation;

None is more important; none is more powerful;

None is more life changing for you and me than this Easter acclamation.

For because Christ has been raised by God from the dead;

A new reality has taken hold in the world;

A new life and future have entered into your life and mine;

And in the midst of the longest Lent any of us have ever known;

In the midst of this pandemic that has turned all of our lives on end

And changed the way we do church and work and live;

This is good news, this is the best news.

For since Christ has been raised from the dead,

The reality and finality of death has been turned around;

Death no longer has the final word, the final reality for our lives;

For because Christ has been raised, we will be raised, too;

Raised in a life, in a new adventure with God that has no ending.

And our loved ones who are gone from us;

Our loved ones who have passed through the door of death are alive; alive with God;

Alive and living the life that is fuller and greater and more beautiful than our best days here;

And one day, we will be with them again.

For since Christ is risen from the dead, the reality and the power of sin no longer binds us;

Sin no longer holds us down or holds us back;

From becoming the persons and people God has created us to be,

We can start over; we can take a do over and offer it ourselves again and again;

For the One who promises forgiveness, Jesus Christ;

Actually has the power to forgive and to restore and to mend;

And He has given that power to us as well.

For since Christ has been raised from the dead;

Our aloneness, our loneliness, our separation from God is over forever;

Because Christ is out there in the world and He's in here, in our own lives;

We have a companionship and a friendship and a love that are ours for all time.

And fear, that old enemy that creeps into our hearts and minds in the middle of the night;

That fear that comes to us in the darkness or stalks us in the full light of day;

With all the concerns and worries and potential catastrophes we think await us;

Fear has been overcome and we have a hope beyond hope;

In a life with God and one another that has purpose and victory.

And the challenge of Easter, the challenge that is before all of us in this Easter acclamation;

Is to accept it; to take hold of it; to open our hearts to God's promise and presence;

And then to live in such a way that our hearts and lives are fully open

To the promise of life with God and the Easter promise of God's unconditional love.

### **The Unfinished Story**

That's Easter Day now, with nearly 2,000 years of the risen Christ alive in the world;

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 that chapter of their lives.

These three women, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome;  
Had come to the empty tomb thinking that the story of Jesus had come to an end;  
That it was all over between Jesus and them.

They had lived with him and learned from him; had experienced the miracles and forgiveness;  
They experienced His personal love and they had seen the agony of Jesus dying on the cross  
Witnessed the lifeless body being taken down and wrapped in a linen shroud;  
They had come to the tomb in the early dawn to anoint and glimpse His body on last time.

And to their utter astonishment and to their great fear and amazement;  
They found out that the story of Jesus wasn't over;  
That the story between Jesus and them was only beginning.

The stone had been rolled away from the entrance to the tomb and Jesus was not there;  
The tomb was empty, except for a man or an angel in white who told them  
That Jesus had been raised; He is not here;  
He is going ahead of you to Galilee and there you will see Him.

So they went, they fled from the tomb as St. Mark writes;  
For terror and amazement had seized them;  
And they said nothing to anyone because they were so afraid.

And here, according to the most reliable sources, Mark's Gospel ends;  
It's not quite the happily ever after close to the story we might expect;  
But instead it's an ending that suggests that there's some unfinished business;  
That there's more to the story of Easter Day.

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

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

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

“The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ the Son of God”;

A pretty strong indication that the women didn't stay silent too long;

And that they and other followers experienced the risen Lord;

Why else would you bother to write this all down?

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

Then you'll quickly realize that there in Galilee is Jesus;

There in the world is Jesus proclaiming the kingdom of God;

Jesus teaching them; Jesus loving them; Jesus present in the Eucharist

Jesus present in the community of His followers;

Jesus calling them to live in His way and to invite others to His way of love.

Either way you look at it from a literary or real life experience;

There's unfinished business because Jesus has been raised 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.

The Easter proclamation, the Easter promise both comforts and challenges us to believe.

Comforts and challenges us to believe not simply that Christ is risen;

Not merely that God raised Jesus from the dead and Christ is alive;

But that the beginning of the good news of salvation and life with God;

Is here and now, here this morning in our lives and we must decide for ourselves;

We must decide for our own lives how this story will continue or end.

### **Three Responses for Living and Telling the Easter Story**

Now there are three ways people tend to respond or decide about this Easter message;

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

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

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

Is just too incredible or ridiculous for us to accept;

And the idea that the story continues on through us is simply discarded;

An illusion or fantasy that's hardly worth considering.

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

We accept the truth that God raised Christ from the dead;

We're comforted at the thought that we can be forgiven;

And that something awaits us on the other side of the door of death;

But we're not really committed to the story continuing through us in the way we live our lives.

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

The response that began to set the world free nearly two thousand years ago;

And reintroduced the presence, the forgiveness, the peace and the love of God;

Into lives like ours, into a world like ours.

It's the response that expects to encounter Jesus along the way, in our everyday lives;

A way of living as though the resurrection matters;

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

We've been called to allow this story, this reality to take hold of our lives;

As we live and love and tell the good news of Easter.

So, on this Easter morning, when the signs of Jesus' resurrection and God's new reality  
Are being heard in the scripture and the music and our conversation;  
When the signs are being evidenced in the life and love of this community;  
I invite you to open your heart to the promise of Jesus' resurrection  
For the first time or in a renewed commitment  
So that the hope, the forgiveness and the love of God  
Can reign in your life more and more and more.

For Christ has been raised from the dead and goes before us;  
Leading us into the life that's really life, now and in an age to come. Amen.