

March 31, 2024
Easter Sunday
The Rev. Amanda Gerken-Nelson

Alleluia! Christ is Risen! ...(**Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!**)

Ah! This is clearly not your first Easter

How can I tell?

When I proclaimed to you that Christ is risen, you weren't terrified and amazed like the women on that early morning at the tomb on the first Easter

You didn't hesitate, you've become well-accustomed to this truth

Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Did you know, though, that terror and amazement are proper responses to this incredibly good news?

Yes, that and silence.

“So [the women] went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.”

Terror, amazement, and silence

What I think is really remarkable is that many religious scholars think that this very verse was the verse the author of the Gospel, Mark, used to conclude his gospel

Truly! How wonderfully dramatic, no?

“...what continues to surprise me,” writes New Testament scholar, Ira Brent Driggers, “is that this silence concludes the Gospel of Mark. Conversely, I am not surprised that some ancient scribes, clearly dissatisfied with Mark’s concluding silence, later added an amalgam of Easter stories featuring the risen Jesus...”¹

They did, they added 11 more verses in which a nondescript Jesus appears to his disciples, but the stories are short and rather non-fantastic like in the other gospels, which is probably why we don’t read them on Easter

“We can hear these scribes asking,” Driggers goes on: “who in their right mind would write a Gospel that ended with fearful silence?”

Who in their right mind wants the response to this life-changing news, to be terror, amazement, and silence?

Oh, but isn’t that, if we truly allow ourselves to think about it, exactly where we find ourselves when actually confronted with this truth: our savior is risen?

Barbara Lundblad, a retired preaching professor from Union Seminary in NYC, writes: “Mark’s story invites us to stand where those first trembling witnesses stood. Those three women didn’t see Jesus. Neither do we. They didn’t hear Jesus call their names. Neither have we. They weren’t invited to touch his wounded hands. We haven’t touched Jesus’ hands either. Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome are our silent sisters. The narrative is left for us, the readers, to complete.”²

¹ <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/resurrection-of-our-lord-2/commentary-on-mark-161-8-7>

² https://www.huffpost.com/entry/mark-16-1-8-beyond-fear-and-silence_b_1402710

When I say “Alleluia! Christ is risen” you rightfully respond “Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!” because many of you have attended Easter services before, or if you haven’t you’ve at least started to pick up on the pattern

But if we allow ourselves to place ourselves at that empty tomb with Mary, and Mary, and Salome – if we allow the news of this righteous truth to wash over us – do we not also tremble in awe? Are we not dumbstruck to know what it means? Do we not struggle for the words to respond or react or explain it to others?

And, with Mark’s gospel ending here, is this not a wonderful acknowledgement from our teaching scriptures that our response – whatever it may be, but especially if it is fear, amazement, and silence – is *exactly* the right response for us to have

Responding “Christ is risen **indeed**” feels so certain, and perhaps many of you are certain, in which case wonderful for you, teach the rest of us! Guide us to what you know!

But, for most of us, we lean into the certainty of those words which the Church has given us and borrow it for a little while so that we might be able to begin to acknowledge what this truth means for us

That in being born of that wonderful prophet, Mary, and having 33 years of a ministry with his disciples on earth, Jesus gave dignity to our human experiences

That in dying to sin, Jesus has invited us to let sin die.

That in rising from the dead, Jesus has given us the gift of new life and second chances!

That in ascending to heaven (which happens some time later), we, too, may trust that there is an eternal home for us among the saints and in the presence of the Divine

No wonder, the women, and we respond with fear, amazement, and silence: what wonder! what beauty! what hope! what now?

You see, even though Mark ended his gospel with the women's silence, Barbara Lundblad notes: we know that "between the women's experience at the empty tomb and Mark's writing, these three women did speak -- or we wouldn't know the story. They went back home to Galilee as Jesus had invited them. Whatever they said to the disciples, their testimony was shaped by" their experience, by their fear, their amazement, and their silence

They eventually found the words.

They eventually found a way to tell the story

They eventually found a way to make meaning of what they experienced...and so will you.

Barbara Lundblad concludes: "The silence at the end of Mark's gospel is always waiting to be filled in by people of every generation, waiting now for you and for me."

So let us, this morning, dwell in the fear, in the amazement, and in the silence of our awe

Let us borrow the certainty of the Church and from all the saints who have come before

And, let us ponder our own responses to this good news: Alleluia, Christ is risen!

Amen.

Note: during the choir's anthem, let their offering wash over us and let's refrain from ringing our bells the whole time