

**Readings & Sermon Easter Sunday**  
**March 31, 2024: Resurrection of Our Lord**  
**Bethel Lutheran Church in Muskego, WI**  
**Pastor Jaime Larson-McLoone**



**Gospel: 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 [Jesus' body]. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb.

<sup>3</sup>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.

## **1 Corinthians 15:1-11**

Now I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand, through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you—unless you have come to believe in vain.

For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them—though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. Whether then it was I or they, so we proclaim and so you have come to believe.

### **Sermon by Pastor Jaime Larson-McLoone “Resurrection is just the beginning.”**

If you are an Easter regular, you know that we have a traditional Easter morning greeting. I say: Alleluia! Christ is risen! And you say: He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Well on Thursday night, it occurred to me that our traditional greeting doesn't quite fit the tone of today's gospel story. And that thought came to me up at Gloria Dei, courtesy of the toddler who walked with me back to my office after worship. Teagan and her mom and I were walking through the building, mostly Maundy Thursday-quietly, and Teagan was looking for her dad. She said something like: Let's scare him.

And when Dave appeared, Teagan said one word: Boo! And I thought to myself, that's not quite a Maundy Thursday greeting. But maybe ... it is a kind of Easter greeting. The lights had been dimmed during our evening worship. Some of the hall lights were turned off, but not all of them. The sun was setting, not rising, but maybe it was still a little like that first Easter morning. Light enough, but not midday bright. Lots of shadows.

And then ... Boo! The young man waiting in the tomb might not have said "boo." But he sure gave those women a scare. The women in today's gospel are not headed to the tomb to witness a resurrection. They are looking for closure. In a final act of faith and devotion, they are prepared to anoint Jesus' body. Then the stone will be rolled back in place, and they will lay to rest the hopes and dreams they had for Jesus, the Son of God, the One bringing healing and well-being to a world in need.



But these women will get no closure. Instead they get a frightening surprise. Like the kind that stops your heart when someone jumps out from behind a corner or

emerges from the shadows: Boo! There's no body, just that young man in a white robe, telling the women not to be alarmed. As if that were possible.

Look around! Nothing here is what they expected.

You're looking for Jesus, the young man says. The One who was crucified. He has been raised. He's not here. Go tell all his disciples that he's headed to Galilee - just like he said. You'll see him there.

The women flee from the tomb, bewildered and shaking with terror. And now we are the ones who get no closure. No "Alleluia! Christ is risen!" No resurrection appearances.

If you open one of the Bibles in front of you to this 16<sup>th</sup> chapter of Mark, though, you'll see it doesn't end at verse eight. There are a couple of alternate endings to this story, ones where Jesus does appear, ones likely added later by scribes who needed the closure of a more satisfying ending.

But the oldest manuscripts give us no closure - because this isn't an ending. It's a beginning.

Back in Chapter 1, Mark's gospel opens with these words: The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

What if the beginning isn't just those first few verses, or even that first chapter. What if the whole gospel of Mark is the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The beginning of a story whose end is still being written. Written in and through our lives.

We may wonder what the women did next. But the real question is: What will we do next? This isn't a story with a tidy beginning, middle, and end. It's more like a Choose Your Own Adventure story.

Maybe some of you remember those. It's a series of books that I read, probably in late elementary school. I checked out a few of them from the library this week to



refresh my memory of how these books work. One of them is called “Space and Beyond.”

Here’s part of the blurb on the back cover: Born aboard a deep space cruiser on a dangerous research mission, you are asked to choose your home planet. Your parents are from different planets in different galaxies. They are different enough that your choice will have a huge effect on your life.

As you read, every few pages, you have to make a new choice. For example, something goes wrong with your flight plan, setting off radiation warnings. And you have to make a choice: You can try to return to the mothership. If you choose this, turn to page 6. If you rely on and trust your instinct to go ahead, then turn to page 7.

Mark leaves us with a choice like that. We have heard the news: Jesus is not in the tomb. He is risen! What will we do with that information? What will we choose?

The apostle Paul chose to proclaim the risen Jesus, and it had a huge effect on his life. He writes in his letter to the Corinthians that he started out persecuting followers of Jesus. Then Jesus met him on his way to Damascus and changed Paul’s life forever.

Paul chose a new adventure: Risking his life to proclaim the grace, peace, and love of Jesus throughout the known world. What will we choose? Will it be an adventure? Will we dare to join the risen Jesus, who is still bringing grace, peace, love, healing, and well-being to the world?

Will we dare to follow in his way? To love the seemingly unlovable? To welcome in those who have been cast out? To seek freedom for all who are oppressed by disease and discrimination, hatred and greed?

Will we choose adventure? Or will we freeze in fear, overwhelmed by the world’s suffering and not sure what we can possibly do to make a difference? Afraid, perhaps, of doing the wrong thing?

Or will we choose to flee for comfort, grateful for Jesus' sacrifice, trusting in the reports of his resurrection, but not ready to commit our whole lives to his cause? In my library book, "Space and Beyond," there are 42 possible endings: some are satisfying, some are disastrous, and some are actually pretty boring. One of them ends with these words: Try again! And good luck! Turn to page 1.

Not an end. A beginning. That sounds a lot like grace to me.



***Will we dare to follow in his way? To love the seemingly unlovable? To welcome in those who have been cast out? To seek freedom for all who are oppressed? Will we choose adventure? Or will we freeze in fear, overwhelmed by the world's suffering and not sure what we can possibly do to make a difference?***

Our lives of faith are filled with choices. Sometimes we'll choose adventure. Sometimes we'll choose comfort. Sometimes fear will win. And always, there is grace. Because whatever choices we make, Jesus is risen, and he is still going out ahead of us. Ready to meet us in Galilee, or Muskego, or Waukesha, or wherever else we are headed next.

The good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God has begun. With the grace and help of God, the next chapters are written in and through our lives.

**Pastor Jaime**

*Presented March 31, 2024 at Bethel Lutheran Church in Muskego, WI USA*

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