

Pastor Kevin Garman

Theme: Rebirth and Renewal

Scripture: Mark 16:1-8

Easter Sunday April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2021

“Arise, Easter People: Christ Will Come Again”

The most important scene of the New Testament is set. Mary Magdalene, one of Jesus’ disciples, Mary, the mother of Jesus, and Salome, Jesus’ aunt, all approach the tomb to offer their gifts and anoint the body of Christ. However, when they arrive at the tomb, they realize the stone has been rolled away. Anxiety rushes over their bodies as they fear the worst that grave robbers have desecrated Jesus’ body or the people who detested Jesus have taken his body in an act of defiance. They run to the tomb to find someone and find something else.

They are overcome with fear as a young man dressed in white is waiting in the tomb. This young man is understood to be an angel because dazzling white clothing is depicted as angelic clothing throughout other stories in the Bible. The angel says 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” (NRSV Mark 16:6-7). Mary Magdalene, Mary, and Salome run in fear to tell the others.

In the ending of the final chapter of Mark, we see these three women tell the other disciples of what they saw. Yet, regardless of these women’s firsthand account, for whatever reason, the disciples do not believe both Mary’s and Salome. However, as the angel said, two disciples are on their way to Emmaus. Even though the disciples are unnamed they are most likely Cleopas and Mary, which are two disciples who witnessed Jesus’ crucifixion and mentioned in other gospels as leaving to spread the good news to other disciples throughout the surrounding area of Jerusalem, and on this journey to Emmaus, Jesus appears to them as a stranger on the road to tell them to spread the good news. Also, just as the angel had proclaimed, Jesus appears to the eleven disciples where Jesus blesses them and proclaims them to spread the good news to the poor and the oppressed to make disciples of Jesus Christ.

Many faith leaders throughout various Christian denominations, but especially in United Methodism, refer to the Christian body as the Easter

people. But what does being the Easter people really mean? It means every Easter season, we are renewed and we are refreshed to live out our calling of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Let us also be clear that we are an Easter people, not an Easter person. It is our God we are called to follow, not my God that demands servitude of me alone.

Paul, throughout his letters, uses the word, "Our Lord" fifty-three times and only uses the word, "My Lord" once (Rich Villodas tweet). Jesus teaches us the prayer, "Our Father," not, "My Father." We in the United Methodist church invite all people to the table of grace as we are all invited to participate in the Holy Sacrament of Communion. The table of grace is our table, not my table. For the Christian faith to find its relevancy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we must think of ourselves as the Easter People who are inviting our community and our world to participate in the love of the gospel.

Covid, in many ways, has forced us to think more communally than individually. I personally despise wearing a mask, but we do it to protect one another. I personally loathe waiting 9 months, across 12 states, and miss holidays and celebrations with my family, but we all patiently wait in anticipation in our homes to protect others from spreading the virus. As we are closer to the ending of this chapter in our world history, we remember these lessons of thinking communally instead of only thinking as individuals. In fact, when we think communally, this is living out the good news of the gospel!

The good news is not just meant for me! The words of Jesus do not read, "Pastor Kevin, it is your job to spread the gospel," but instead it reads more like, "**Look at people and say their names** and all of Glendive/**Wibaux**, MT, it is our job to spread the good news!" Jesus did not say, "Pastor Kevin, it is your good news to only keep to yourself," but it reads more like, "**Look at people and say their names** and all of Glendive/**Wibaux**, go out and spread the good news to your neighbors!" We are an Easter people together!

The rolling away of the stone in the story of the Resurrection is symbolic to us as an Easter people. John Phillip Newell, as you all know is one of my favorite theologians, and he often says Christ is at the heart of who we are and all of creation is the heartbeat of God. The symbolism of the stone in the story of the Resurrection is Jesus moves the stones of our hearts away from our pride and selfishness as we open our hearts to the world, just as Jesus taught us to do. We share the good news with all of God's creation to share the grace of God, the peace of God, seek the justice

of God, and learn to be compassionate beings with one another through God. This is why we are the Easter people.

So, Arise, Easter people, arise for our God is with us! Arise, Easter People, arise for our God has not forsaken us! Arise, Easter People, arise for our God walks with us as our God lifts every voice to sing! Arise, Easter People, arise for our God is calling us today as our God called the prophets to proclaim, "The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; <sup>2</sup> to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; <sup>3</sup> to provide for those who mourn in Zion—to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, to display his glory. <sup>4</sup> They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations. <sup>5</sup> Strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, foreigners shall till your land and dress your vines; <sup>6</sup> but you shall be called priests of the Lord, you shall be named ministers of our God; you shall enjoy the wealth of the nations, and in their riches you shall glory. <sup>7</sup> Because their shame was double, and dishonor was proclaimed as their lot, therefore they shall possess a double portion; everlasting joy shall be theirs. <sup>8</sup> For I the Lord love justice, I hate robbery and wrongdoing; I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them. <sup>9</sup> Their descendants shall be known among the nations, and their offspring among the peoples; all who see them shall acknowledge that they are a people whom the Lord has blessed" (NRSV Isaiah 61:1-9).

The temptations of evil and Satan will no doubt tempt us like Jesus. Do not forget that Jesus turned away three things during his temptation in the wilderness. Jesus turns away hoarding in abundance when he says, "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" (NRSV Matthew 4:4). Jesus turns away riches, an abundance of wealth, and fame of the people when he says, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test" (NRSV Matthew 4:7). Jesus turns away power and prestige when he says, "Worship the Lord your God and serve only him" (NRSV Matthew 4:10). As Easter people, we must resist these temptations in our world today, both as individuals and communities as we work to think of how we fully serve God's creation as the body of Christ!

As Easter People, we rise up to call out the injustices of our world, rise up to be compassionate to those who wrong us and have greater needs than us, rise up and put the needs of others equal to our own needs, and rise up to spread the love of God to all those we encounter. In her practice of social holiness through addressing the needs of the poor, working-class and leading her people in the Women's Suffrage Movement and the Catholic Workers Movement, Dorothy Day says this, "The greatest challenge of the day is how to bring about a revolution of the heart, a revolution which has to start with each one of us." Just as our Savior rose from grave, we rise up today, renewed and refreshed, as the Easter People of God! We rise up to proclaim the good news to the poor and the oppressed! We rise up in solidarity to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ in the name of Love, Compassion, Justice, and Grace to all of God's creation! So Arise, Easter People, Arise for our God is risen from the grave!