

The Rev. Emily Dunevant

Mark 16:1-8

Acts 10:34-43

Psalms 118:1-2,14-24

1 Cor. 15:1-11

April 1, 2018  
Easter Sunday

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What is it about Easter that keeps us coming back year after year? I ask that question seriously. What is it that gets us out of bed on this particular Sunday? When I was a kid it was because my mother said so. I hated getting dressed up and frilling dresses were the absolute worst, not to mention those Easter bonnets and gloves that we used to have to wear. I still have old photos of me grimacing as my mother told me to stand still for the annual family Easter picture.

I always thought it interesting that on this day, above all the others we had to make such a fuss. It was hard to appreciate as a kid. And as I got older I began noticing that after the celebration was over, after the church service had ended, after the big meal was served, after the chocolate bunny was eaten, things typically went back to the way they always had been. By most accounts, Easter Sunday was a day on the calendar...to be sure it was always an important day but it left me wondering what are we do to on Easter Monday?

There is no doubt that we come to church every Easter because we know we need to be here. We need to hear the Easter story again and again, year after year, because this is often the closest we feel to God's outpouring of love for us. We come because we are hungry to hear those promises of redemption and grace. We come because there is something so amazing, so incredible about the Easter story that we simply can't stay away. Because we believe that on Easter, everything changes.

So my challenge for you today is this...If we believe that Jesus died for our sins, if we believe that we are forgiven, if we believe that we are loved immeasurably by God, what then do we do on Easter Monday? How do we live so that Easter isn't just a day on the calendar but that it is a life changing event that takes us and remakes us, that inspires us and encourages us?

Because today is about life...your life. And through God's love for you...God gave his son to come down to this earth and live. He lived to show us what love is all about, what service and justice and leadership should look like. And he died to show us what salvation and redemption and forgiveness feel like. Christ lived and died so that your life can be made anew. Christ lived and died so that you would know beyond a shadow of a doubt that your life has meaning and purpose and that you are valuable beyond measure.

We come here each year to be reminded of these truths so that when we say, Christ is Risen, Christ is Risen indeed, we are also saying...I am forgiven. I am forgiven indeed. We are saying...I am loved. I am loved indeed. Because on Easter, everything changes. And that means we can't live as we once did. Tomorrow, Easter Monday, begins a new chapter for you.

But...as great as that message may be, how we will live into our Monday may look quite different for each of us.

Some of us will be like the Apostle Paul who states in our reading from Corinthians this morning, "By the grace of God, I am what I am." And Paul knows something about change and he can't wait to shout it from the mountain. If we met Paul today, we might say he is just a bit over the top in his love of evangelizing to anyone that he meets. In fact, if he was sitting next to us at the dinner table we might find ourselves moving down a few seats to get some space from his over-exuberant self.

But for Paul, who he became was a gift of grace so incredible that he himself almost couldn't believe it. He had spent years persecuting the church, a Roman tyrant who targeted the early followers of Jesus. He was feared and by all accounts he seemed unredeemable. But Jesus thought otherwise. One day on the road to Damascus, Paul had a conversion experience that changed the course of his life. On that day his heart changed and he never looked back. He became not only a changed man, turning away from his old way of life, but a man empowered by the gift of redemption.

Paul became a preacher and teacher, a leader, an advocate for Christ's saving act upon the cross. In 1 Corinthians we find Paul telling the Easter story to anyone who would hear – that Christ died for our sins, that he was buried and was raised and after his resurrection, Paul tells us that Jesus appeared to him. In that moment, his life was reoriented to something greater, no matter how deep his sin may have been. Paul describes himself as unfit to serve, as too sinful, too broken to be among Christ's chosen. Yet, he was chosen nonetheless. He was redeemed through Christ's sacrifice. And he couldn't stop talking about it. That was Paul's Easter Monday.

On the other hand, there is Mary in our Gospel reading. She is at the other end of the spectrum. She actually got to walk into the empty tomb and see first hand that Jesus was not there. She saw first hand the angel who told her Jesus had risen. She heard what she was to do. It was clear – she was to go out and tell others what she has seen. She was one of the fortunate few who got to witness right in front of her the miracle of the resurrection. And what did she do? She ran away. She couldn't grasp what had happened. She couldn't get her mind around what it all meant and she was afraid and she didn't say anything to anyone. Mary's Easter Monday was silent.

Reflecting upon these two individuals, I realized that when we see the Paul's in our lives, that kind of Easter living seems almost unattainable. You may even think that that kind of belief and dedication is impossible. It's so confident, so outspoken. How could he be so sure? How did his life change so dramatically? Maybe you have thought...sure, I've heard of this happening, this kind of conversion moment. I've heard about what faith can do but I just don't see it happening in my life.

When we think like that, too often we end up like Mary. Feeling unsure, skeptical, maybe even afraid because the idea of trusting these kind of promises seems impossible. So we just put it

aside and think...maybe I'll get around to turning my life over to God one day, when I can feel more certain of his promises, but maybe just not today. Maybe I'm just not ready to trust in something I can't see and feel and touch. Maybe I'm not ready to believe I am worthy of such extraordinary grace. Why do I deserve this kind of redemption? Sound familiar? We can come up with all kinds of reasons to not live into the Easter story.

It's often so hard to grasp that Jesus died for us. That despite all of the things you have done wrong, all of the poor choices, all of the missed opportunities, all of the things you wish you could take back...all of them are forgiven. It's hard to believe that all of your fears, all of your anger, all of your hurt and pain and suffering can be turned over to God, that you no longer have to carry those burdens alone.

But isn't that why we keep coming back year after year on this particular Sunday...because we need to be reminded. We need to remember. We are so hungry to believe that God really does meet us in our brokenness and does something amazing! So we come back to hear those promises again and again until we are able to claim them as our own.

There is an old gospel song that I used to sing in church. The words go like this:  
Because he lives, I can face tomorrow.  
Because he lives, all fear is gone.  
Because I know he holds the future.  
And life is worth the living just because he lives.

Easter is about life – your life. The kind of life that is worth living because Christ holds your future no matter what may have held your past.

So, today you may hear the Easter story but tomorrow you get to live it. You get to live forgiveness, you get to live redemption, you get to live new life and new beginnings – not just today but every day! Because Easter is not a one-day celebration. It is a celebration about how we will live tomorrow.

Christ is Risen! Christ is Risen, Indeed!!

Thanks be to God. Amen.