

Resurrection of Our Lord 2020

Mark 16:1-8

April 12, 2020

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

Here's the question: "If a sea lion claps at the Bronx Zoo, and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound?"¹ The Bronx Zoo is closed indefinitely because of COVID-19, so the critters have only the company of the zoo keepers and other essential employees who remain on duty. Used to a whole parade of visitors, especially on beautiful spring days, the primates, in particular, are a little confused by the lack of action. The director of the zoo, Jim Breheny, recently peeked through one viewing window and quickly attracted the attention of a whole troop of monkeys who rushed over and stared at him through the glass, their prize human sighting of the day! Mr. Breheny reflected, "The animals are blissfully unaware of what the rest of us have been going through... What I wouldn't give for that innocence."

Yup. It's a strange springtime, a strange, socially distanced, live-streamed Easter for all of us. We have a strange Gospel today, too, to match the times. If you look in your Bible, you'll see that there are 12 more verses in Mark's Gospel that we did **not** hear this morning. That's because archeologists have found 4 different versions of this Gospel, and the shortest, the one we just heard, is believed to be the most original.

People have wondered, "Why did anyone feel the need to **add** to the original??" The simplest answer is that the original is so darned troubling. Two thousand years ago people didn't like abrupt endings any more than we do. We want resolution, we prefer things tied up with a bow, we **don't** like leaving the story with the women so terrified they remain as silent as **they thought** Jesus' tomb would be.

Mark says that when Mary, Mary and Salome see a young man dressed all in white sitting in the empty tomb they are "alarmed." A more accurate word is "distressed." The angelic figure tells

them **not** to be distressed, because Jesus has been raised and is going ahead to meet them back in Galilee, but his announcement doesn't really take the edge off:

...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. (Mark 16:8)

The end.

'Leaves us a little unsettled, doesn't it? We want those ladies leaving excitedly and joyfully singing the Hallelujah Chorus, but instead they're running away in fear like a junkyard dog is nipping at their heels. We can identify with them, can't we? This pandemic has sown seeds of terror in our land and around the globe. Many hearts are breaking because of the death of loved ones or the inability to visit loved ones in hospitals, rehabs, senior living facilities.... The worry of unemployment, the loneliness of isolation and quarantine, the stress of the world being turned topsy turvy.... What better time to hear an Easter Gospel that does **not** tie everything up neatly?

In her Holy Saturday e-devotion, Sue Ardito wrote, "Remember, on the first Easter, Jesus' disciples were afraid and alone in their houses when they got the good news of the Resurrection." Sound familiar? Hit close to home? Anybody else "Afraid and [if not alone, sequestered] in their houses when they [hear again] the good news of the Resurrection"? Like Mary, Mary and Salome, we've been **told** that Christ is risen, but we don't always **feel** that way. So it's a good thing that emotions are not the litmus test of faith. (A friend once told me that if faith depended on how we feel, we could eat a pepperoni pizza at night and wake up an atheist!) Faith is the ability to trust that what we cannot see, what we cannot get our arms around, **is real**. Faith is trusting that even if it seems we're stuck in an endless Good Friday spin cycle, **Christ is risen and is powerful to save**.

To put it mildly, there have been a lot of devastating images on the news. One of the most **beautiful** photos I've seen, though, was on the front page of the paper on the last day of March. It

was a photo of the white U.S. Naval Hospital Ship Comfort, a huge red cross emblazoned on it, being ferried into New York Harbor by tug boats. The photo also captured a sea gull flying over the prow, almost appearing to lead the ship like the little dove that carried Noah the olive branch once the waters of the Flood had receded. It was an image of such hope – and Comfort! Kinda like the cavalry had arrived....

That red cross speaks of God's love for all of us. The red cross also speaks of God's children's compassion for one another. **And** that red cross speaks of healing and hope and holy accompaniment: *"I was sick and you took care of me."* (Matthew 25:36) *"Lord... when was it that we saw you sick... and visited you?" And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."* (Matthew 25:39-40)

The virtual pews are full on this Easter Sunday. We're present in strength so let's lift up our prayers for all the health care workers, first responders, police, firefighters, soldiers and sailors who are risking their lives to save ours. Let's also pray for those who provide other important services that take them out of the safety of their own homes: those who make and serve the meals that hungry schoolchildren, patients, residents of nursing homes still need, those who run the trains and drive the buses, those who help people to navigate social services and to apply for assistance and to seek shelter in cases of domestic violence.

Some of us are more like the tugboats than the hospital ship. We're smaller, with a lower profile and working at humbler, yet still essential, jobs: directing the help where it needs to go. Reaching out by phone or e-mail or snail mail to those who are alone, seeing who needs help, offering that help or notifying someone else who can. Sewing masks. Giving money to underwrite the ministry that needs to be done, now more than ever. Every one of us, no matter how old or young we are, can be a little tugboat directing Comfort to those who need it. Even the Bronx Zoo s

doing its part, offering up its otherwise empty parking lot as temporary home to 250 ambulances on loan from all across the country to help New York City, and allowing tents to be erected there for COVID-19 testing of Montefiore Medical Center staff. ‘Certainly gives the animals something to watch!

As Mary, Mary and Salome fled the tomb, maybe they were praying no one was going to quiz them about where they’d been so early in the day, just hoping no one would ask, “So, what’s new??” Maybe they were afraid people would think they were off their rocker for telling such a cockamamie story. Maybe their circuits were so jammed by the unexpected news that they couldn’t string together two coherent thoughts. Maybe the Lord’s death was so vivid in their memory that they couldn’t **begin** to grasp His resurrection. Yet.

Easter would have been tough to celebrate if it had fallen in the immediate wake of 9/11, while the Pile was still smoldering. Easter would have been tough to celebrate if Sandy’s flood waters hadn’t receded yet. This year Easter falls as the COVID curve peaks, as deaths mount, as the virus continues to radically rearrange our lives. It’s harder to celebrate Easter now, logistically and emotionally, but it’s also oh-so-meaningful. Dear Holy Spirit, give us grace to claim the power of the resurrection in this moment, grant us eyes to see the risen Christ present among us, give us opportunity to sow resurrection seeds in this trying time, as we wait, in hope. Amen

¹Julia Jacobs, “Working From a Quieter Home” (*NY Times*, April 4, 2020), C1.

²Ibid, C4.

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