

Looking for Jesus

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael – March 31, 2024

Easter Sunday

Readings: Acts 10:34-43; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11; Mark 16:1-8

Reflection: Psalm 46

Greeting: Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Prayer: Almighty God, we have journeyed with Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem. We have laid our festal branches on the road with loud hosannas. We have seen Christ handed over out of fear. We followed him to the cross and bore witness to his crucifixion. You led us to see the rock rolled to seal the tomb. This morning we celebrate how you overcame death and opened the door of eternal life for us through Jesus Christ, our redeemer. Renew us and refresh us in your Holy Spirit as we celebrate the miracle of the empty tomb. Help us to see the light of resurrection that it may lift our hearts together in this place. May we be freed from slavery to sin and death, and may you help us arise into a life of righteousness through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 46

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High. God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved; God will help it when the morning dawns. The nations are in an uproar; the kingdoms totter; he utters his voice; the earth melts. The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Come, behold the works of the Lord; see what desolations he has brought on the earth. He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the shields with fire. "Be still, and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations; I am exalted in the earth." The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. (Psalm 46 NRSV)*

We read the words of Psalm 46, and we hear about how God is with us. That God is there to strengthen us and to guide us. That he brings an end to war and brings peace. That he is our refuge and our salvation. What are the celebrations of your heart this morning? What are the words that come from your heart to praise the Lord? Who can you lift up in prayer as we remember the joy we find in God's love and care? How can we share our risen savior with those around us? How can we share the hope that the resurrection gives us?

Prayer: O God, our light, our beauty, our rest: In the resurrection of your Son you have brought us into your new creation. Form us into your people and order our lives in you. We thank you for all you have already done and the great love that has been shown to us. We lift up our joys and our concerns, bringing all things before you. We share with you the worries that we have spoken aloud. We share the celebrations that we have shared aloud. Help us to also share the silent pleadings from within. May we experience your grace in our laughter and our tears. May you strengthen us in sorrow and in rejoicing, knowing you are with us. And may you guide us in love, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. Alleluia.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon:

Our scripture readings for today come from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our first reading is from Acts chapter 10, verse 34 through 43.

Then Peter began to speak to them: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every people anyone who fears him and practices righteousness is acceptable to him. You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all. That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name." (Acts 10:34-43 NRSV)*

Our next reading is from 1 Corinthians chapter 15, verses 1 through 11.

Now I want you to understand, brothers and sisters, 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 believed. (1 Corinthians 15:1-11 NRSV)*

Our final reading is from Mark chapter 16, verses 1 through 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 him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. 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. (Mark 16:1-8 NRSV)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

Today we mark the joy of an empty tomb. Throughout Lent we have been making our way to this point. Our focus has been on the sacrifice made in love. And this marks the next chapter. We have made our way to the cross. We have borne witness to the crucifixion. We remember Christ being laid in the tomb. And this morning when we come looking for Jesus, we find the tomb empty. We share together in the promise of resurrection. We are looking at Mark's account of the resurrection, which I think is my favorite of the accounts from the gospels. There is something wonderful about how Mark frames this. I think Mark's account brings us into the story. We hear from Mark that Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome head out to the tomb. They are wondering who will roll the stone away as they head out to prepare the body of Jesus for final burial. When they get there, they find the stone already rolled back. When they go in, they find a young man dressed in white. He points out the place where Jesus had been placed. He informs them that Jesus is not there. He has been raised. They come looking for Jesus and they discover a miracle. They are told to tell the others that Jesus is going ahead of them to Galilee. But they are afraid. This would have been a tremendous shock. Something amazing. "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." I can't blame them. That whole situation would have been overwhelming. But this is where you come in. This is where Mark's account ends. They flee. You might be thinking that this is a very unsatisfactory ending. You might be asking the question "What comes next?" But it isn't the end of the story. That is where you come in. Because you are the answer to the question. I feel that the ending we are given invites us to experience the resurrection. We are called to ask ourselves what does come next. We aren't looking for someone else to tell us the story because we are now living it. We aren't looking for the end of a story, but we are starting the next chapter. What comes next is the way that we will use this information to live our lives. How will we accept this gift and proclaim the good news? Because if you too are looking for Jesus and find that he is raised, how will this change your life?

I think that's what makes this my favorite account. Because we hear about how others reacted. In Acts we hear Peter speaking on behalf of all of the followers in the way that Christ's life, death, and resurrection have impacted him and the others. We hear it from Paul talking about how this information has changed his life. Mark invites us to tell our story. The gospel is inviting us to remember that the story hasn't ended. Because if we live in Christ and we die in Christ and we are raised in Christ, the story is our story. If you are looking for Jesus, the story is yours. The resurrection is for you. I can share with you how it has changed my life. That inviting Christ in allowed me to heal, to become whole, and to find a community that I desperately needed. A community that has seen me through some of the most difficult parts of my life. That I am forever thankful for because Christ put me where I needed to be. In looking for Jesus I found a home. That I can be here with you today. And I'm always thankful because I know that Christ was with me every step in that journey. That every time I turned away from him, he was still there. Every time I thought I needed something else, he stuck with me until I could see what I truly needed. And when I went looking for Jesus, he was right there. Sometimes I know I have felt like the women who found the empty tomb. Gripped by fear and amazement. Fear because I don't always know what to do with such tremendous love. And sometimes I'm afraid I'm going to mess it up. But then the amazement takes over. I remember all that God has done in my life and all the times that Christ has been there, right where I needed him to be, putting the people in my life that helped me to be the best person, the best father I can be. And I know that this story is my story.

Throughout Lent, we have explored giving up of self so that we may help each other. We have looked at being selfless, following the example set by Christ. That he empties himself to the point of death, even death on a cross. That he humbles himself. That he experiences our pain, our suffering, and our loss. And he tells us that there's so much more. That even death is not the end of our story. Because the promise of Easter is that with Christ there is always more. Which means there's always more for us to tell. That there will always be more for us to share. There will always be more for us to do. And there will always be more love to give. Because the resurrection is the promise that through it all, no matter what, Christ will be there in this life and with the promise of life to come. That through it all we have hope beyond hope because we are never alone. And no matter what we have a future full of love and grace.

But it's up to us to tell the story. And we have to tell the story through. That we cannot end right when the story begins. We have to tell the story of Christ through to how it has changed our lives. What Jesus the Son means to you. What our Heavenly Father's love means in your life. What the guidance of the Holy Spirit has brought you. Because this is now our story. We live it, we walk it, and it's up to us to tell it. Because no one can tell your story in Christ except for you. No one can bear witness to what Christ has done in your life except for you. No one can share the love that you personally have experienced in Christ except for you. Because that story is your story. That faith is your faith. And every struggle, every hardship, every triumph, every success, every laugh, and every tear are part of your journey in Christ. It

is all your story to tell. And that is my message today for all of you. Whether you have been on this journey a long time, or today marks the first step into a brand-new journey for you. Whether your story is a thousand pages long or you've just written the first two sentences, it's still yours and it still matters. Because Christ thinks it's a story worth hearing. Because his journey was all so that you could share that story. His life, his death, and his resurrection have led to this moment in your life. It is up to you to choose what you will do with it. You decide how you will share the good news, how you will share the message that Christ has died, Christ has risen, and Christ will come again. And now you get to tell the story of what Jesus means in your life. How he has affected your heart. I pray that each and every one of you is able to share that story gladly so that others may begin writing the first chapter of their own story of this wonderful journey that we all share together in Jesus Christ our Lord. Happy Easter and Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: God, you are with us even when we turn away from you. Guide us back into your loving arms. Judge us not by the perfection of our actions but show us mercy and love. We have strayed like lost sheep from your ways, failing both in what we have done and what we have failed to do. Bring us back into your fold that you may guide us and lead us in all things. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us and forgive us. May we walk in your love and trust your ways. Amen.

Almighty God have mercy upon you. May the Lord forgive all your sins and lift you up in love through Jesus Christ our Lord, and by the Holy Spirit keep you in life eternal. Amen.

Offering: If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

Lord's Prayer

Dismissal with Blessing: May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Current Series – Depths of Love

Our Lenten series explores the depths of love as we journey to the cross. Each week we take we reflect on the love that Christ has shown to each of us. And each week we take another step closer to standing at the foot of the cross.

February 18th – Has Come Near February 25th – For the Sake of the Gospel
 March 3rd – I Will Raise It Up March 10th – Loving the Light
 March 17th – Whoever Serves March 24th – Blessed is the One
 March 29th – Hail, King of the Jews

Prayer List

Rev Angie Lee	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Eric Veach
Ed & Verna Titus	Henry Catey	Jake Kiser	Cindy Cisney
Tricia Adkins	Don Stewart	Ronnie Winstead	Lauren Stewart
Tom Finley	Laura Carlen	Rosie Chancellor	Chuck Hogan
Richard Durham	Kathy Hanks	Emily Blade	Tim Schnauz
Donna Carlen	Ernie Peters	Jess Shoot	Stanley Kiser
Corine Howard	Don Gilmore	Shirley Jester	Marsha Overton
Linda Carlen	Michael Nichols	Paul Cox	Taylor Waldorf
Harriet Tucker	Marlene Kincaid	Cara Dillier	Peggy Farley
Mandy Schumacher	Ann McMorris	Marci Cutts Smith	Jaydelyn Brassard
Pat Hayden Titus	Devona Dittamore	Nancy McElravy	Jeff & Laurie Davidson
Family of Brad Anderson	Marie R.	Connie Brown	Thelma Ball
Stephanie Strewsbury	Family of Ed Davis	Amanda Stults Charter	Gary & Mary Winterrowd
Leo Smith	Larry Thompson	Greg Williams	Jim & Kay Wells

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