

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

(Christ is risen! Alleluia!)

It is true that your Lord is risen from the grave. Life is coursing once again through His veins. He who had become your sin so that it would be obliterated in death, the Righteousness of God sacrificed in your place for all the wrong you have and will ever say or think or do, He is alive once again with mercy and grace and compassion and life for you.

There is a reason we sing our Alleluia's loudest on Christmas and today on Easter—to praise God that He has done all that is necessary to reconcile us sinners back to Himself who is Holiness, this is proper for us to do. So endless alleluias to Christ our Risen Lord!

Satan no longer has sway over us. Our sin no longer held against us. Death no longer looming as the final threat and enemy.

And yet.

It is presumed that Mark was written to Christians undergoing persecution in Rome, and his writing, what he chooses to emphasize throughout his Gospel and which aspects of this Easter day, certainly, that he opts to communicate or leave out, this would resonate with those who do not necessarily feel like they are living in a post-Easter world.

Here in the immediate scene at the tomb, they do not encounter Jesus, not in Mark's account, not yet at least. And the angel that they run across, he isn't identified so clearly, so gloriously—he is simply a young man, but we can understand that he is angelic because of his clothing and the message he knows to communicate, a message just for them. And Mark doesn't give to us the fanfare of the earthquake and the fainting soldiers and the moments that other Gospels include to highlight the triumph and victory of this Easter Day. That's not to say they didn't happen, or that Mark got it wrong in leaving them out—these authors all communicated, and faithfully so, the account of our Lord and His disciples, but they did so in a way that would preach the fullness of our hope to each of their

respective hearers. And we reap the benefit because we get a fuller picture because of it.

Mark needed his audience to know that it is okay if it doesn't feel or look like Easter, even on Easter Day.

These women had heard the prophecies about Jesus' death and He had been so clear that that wasn't the end—He would rise again. They had heard this, but like the rest of the disciples, it seems just as clear that they never really understood it, and then seeing their Lord taken from their midst, hung up to die, and then buried, dead—this reality seems to have pushed any notion of hope from their minds.

So out of love for their friend and their Lord they begin preparation for His body as soon as it is lawful for them to do so—Saturday evening they begin gathering the spices, and early Sunday they make their way to the tomb. But it seems that in their haste, and likely in their grief and maybe even fear, they have forgotten that the stone was rolled in front of their Lord. They had seen it but they had neglected to account for such an obstacle.

But it was no worry, for somebody else had already accomplished the feat.

Which would have stirred up fears—what had happened to their Lord's body? Best case scenario, someone else was already preparing it, worst case, it had been stolen and being desecrated, as if the crucifixion wasn't brutal enough.

The young man, already inside, knowing full well that such a scene startled them as they peeked into the tomb, he tells them not to be alarmed. This messenger, without any great ordeal or introduction, he tells them exactly what they need to hear. Their Lord is risen, and it is just as He had said. He would meet again with His followers, and with Peter specifically, in Gallilee, just as He said.

Nothing had gone wrong, even though they had witnessed their teacher and beloved Jesus brutalized and die. Nothing had strayed from the will and the plan of God even though it looked like, and certainly felt like nothing had gone right.

At such comforting words, words of promise and of God's care and His power, at the angel's reassurance the women flee trembling and astonished, silenced because they were afraid.

There are no sighs of relief. They don't weep for joy. They don't smack their head as exclaim "Of course! That's what He meant when He said He would die and rise again!" And for them as they experienced the first Easter—we have the gift of having been around the block once or twice—a living Jesus is a hard thing to process. Yes, they had witnessed Him raise a few dead bodies over His ministry, but when the One with power over death dies, hope seems to shrivel up and vanish, so you don't really expect much other than a dead Christ when you visit His tomb. It's a hard mind-shift to make, to comprehend that your loved one who was dead is alive again.

And then to take this angel, this messenger at his word, to walk away from the tomb by faith in a risen Christ, that is harder than I want to give credit.

But is their silence any different than mine? Is their fear any different than ours? Jesus is risen from the dead—that is the ultimate fact. But it takes us sinners a moment (a lifetime, in fact, and a death) to believe it as we ought to.

Because the women didn't (yet) get to see Jesus, the holes in His hands and feet, the words He still had to share with them, and neither do we. Today you don't even get an angel—though I am here as a messenger—to proclaim that your Lord is no longer dead in the tomb. So in the face of the real, still broken world that we live in, you have to take Jesus at His Word that He has defeated death and that your sin, even your ongoing sin, doesn't get to condemn you in the end.

And on days that believing that is easy, and on days when it feels like hope is just about to jump out the window, Christ is still raised from the dead. On the days when it feels like death is getting the upper hand, or your body is intent on screaming into your ears so you can't focus on anything other than your hips or your back or your cramps or the blinding headache, Christ has opened the doors to the New Creation when pain and suffering will be no more. On the days when fear

lurks in your mind—fear over what others might do or say if you were to be so bold as to profess your faith, or fear over your sins, like when you fail to profess your faith or you fail to fight against temptation or you fail to (and you can fill in the blank here)—Jesus has still died in your place, your faithlessness condemned in Him so you have nothing to fear, even though, I know, that fear just won't quit.

A dear colleague of mine says “we are Easter people living in a Good Friday world.” We know the promises of Easter to be true even when the pain and the sin and the death of Good Friday abound. And there is no shame in being overwhelmed by the realities of this world even though you know Easter to be true. The all-encompassing goodness of our Isaiah reading still must be taken by faith, and so it's hard to cling to. We don't always eat of the finest meats and drinks the best wines. All our tears have not been wiped away and we still yearn to be comforted. Death, as defeated as it is, has not yet been completely swallowed up. By faith, yes, all of this is true. But as we live, we must still come face to face with the troubles of this life.

And so even on the hardest days to believe that Easter really happened, Christ, your Lord is risen from the dead. In spite of the sin that you still commit, regardless of the pain and death that threatens you, and certainly no matter what the enemy might try to tell you—Christ your Lord is risen, risen and reigning to walk with you even on the hardest days, with you with His victorious love, no matter what.

In His Name.

Amen

