

THE RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD

Mark 16:1-8

"And Peter"

This text is full of beautiful words, but there are a few in particular that struck me especially hard as I pondered St. Mark's account of the resurrection.

"Don't be afraid." Those are beautiful words. They sum up the gospel. Don't be afraid, for He said all along this would happen. Death has lost its sting. Christ destroyed it by enduring it. Hell now has no hold on you. Christ descended to slam shut its gates. How could you be afraid? Our Jesus lives! Don't be afraid! These are beautiful words.

"He is risen." Those are beautiful words too. He is risen, and the devil is cast down. He is risen, and sin is buried. He is risen, and death has died. He is risen, and life springs forth from the grave. He is risen! These are beautiful words.

But these still aren't the words I have in mind. The beautiful words I have in mind come next. "And Peter." Those are the words I can't get out of my head. "Go, tell His disciples AND PETER." As I studied this text, those words are what really brought everything this day is about home for me. "And Peter."

Think of Peter. He had betrayed His Lord just a little while after promising to follow Him, even unto death. He had failed the Savior. His big moment of testing came and he flunked. And now it was too late. His Master was dead and buried. There was no opportunity to make things better, to apologize. "But, thanks be to God! Unbeknownst to Peter, His Master was dead and buried no more. He had risen, just as He said, and before Peter could apologize, Christ had already made sure that the good news of His resurrection was announced, not just to all of the disciples, but especially to him. "And Peter."

"Et tu, Brute?" "And you, Brutus?" Those were the words Shakespeare had Caesar speak when he realized that even his best friend was conspiring to take his life. The friendship ended in betrayal. But Christ now has the angel speak His "And you" in a different tone and to a different end. These are words of friendship and love. The friendship did not end with Peter's betrayal. It is born anew through Christ's forgiving love.

The early church and most scholars worth the books on their shelf still today are confident that St. Mark wrote his Gospel based on the preaching of St. Peter. So far as I can tell, the "And Peter" appears only in St. Mark's Gospel. I find this mesmerizing. St. Peter himself likely preached this "And Peter," confessing the mercy of Christ shortly after confessing the sin of his betrayal. How beautiful! It makes sense that such a message would stick with St. Mark, because by all accounts he was the same youth, recorded only in St. Mark's Gospel, who fled naked from Gethsemane when Christ was betrayed, so frightened he left his robe behind when they seized him. In St. Peter's account of the "And Peter" spoken to the women, St. Mark surely would have heard an "And Mark" as well. And, this Easter, I pray you hear an "And you."

Have you flunked any of your tests of faith? Have you turned your back on your Master? Have you wavered under pressure, left filled with regret and devoid of hope? "And Peter." "And you." The gospel is always personal, applied to specific individuals in specific situations. Your Savior has risen to restore you. He has returned to seek you out and to proclaim good news to you. Though you've faltered, He's remained steadfast in love. He still has use for you. He will not let go of you. "And Peter." "And you."

The apostles hadn't exactly been stalwarts of faith in the past few days. In fact, they remained unimpressively unimpressive up to the point Jesus appeared to them. The women muster up the courage and head out to anoint their dead Rabbi as the big bad fishermen cower and hide. The women brave the prospect of a huge rock and ornery Roman soldiers. It's a good thing Jesus wasn't still in His grave or He surely would have been rolling over in it. But still, Christ is sure to have this angel tell the women to "go and tell His disciples and Peter." Christ does not hold a grudge. In fact, He died to let grudges go. And He sought out those apostles again and sent them out in His name as His spokesmen, as His brothers.

The resurrection is about new life, especially eternal life, but the resurrection is about new life here and now as well. Buried with Christ in Baptism, we now rise to new life in Him who died to give it to us. Where before there was only us involved in decisions and only our own self-interest to motivate us, now there is a new Man and an eternal gratitude.

"And Peter." Today is the first day of the week, a day for feasting. Death has been swallowed up. Our long awaited salvation has arrived. The Savior wipes away our tears. On the seventh day God rested. On this first day of a new week, the eighth day, God begins creation anew, raising up again what had fallen into sin, beginning our renewal in His image. Death must now give way to life, sin to grace, fear to comfort, sadness to joy, doubt to conviction, despair to hope, punishment to reward, apologies to forgiveness, and confusion to peace.

"And Peter." "And you." This is your new day. By Christ's resurrection, it is the first day of eternal life. Bury your sin in His empty tomb, because there is plenty of room. He isn't using it anymore. Have you come to the tomb early? Rejoice! Have you come late? Rejoice! Have you come to remember the dead? Rejoice! Have you come seeking the living? Rejoice! Have you come to escape your sin? Rejoice! Have you come to find your forgiveness? Rejoice! Have you come in faith? Rejoice! Have you come looking for something to believe? Rejoice! No matter how you have come, rejoice, for your Jesus lives! He lives and we receive not dead Body and Blood, but living! He lives, and He lives for you! And you! Beautiful words, aren't they: "And Peter"? Amen.