

Introduction to themes for the day and the season of Easter: Today begins an entire season celebrating the resurrection. We will have several weeks where our liturgy is full and we will marvel together. The season invites us explore the implications of an empty tomb—what might that mean for us? What might it mean for all creation?

Gospel: Mark 16:1-8

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. 2And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. 3They had been saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?” 4When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. 5As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. 6But 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. 7But 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.” 8So 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.

Sermon:

What is the hardest thing to believe? An unmovable stone is already moved? A body is missing? A tomb is empty?

The women stand before an open grave to which they brought spices to anoint Jesus’ dead body. That was to be the end of it. Maybe even the end of their community. No beginning in sight.

Mark describes the women’s reaction to the holy messenger as a profound awe grips them. The presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America translates the word describing the women’s amazement as standing in a whole dif-

ferent place. The women's feet are firmly planted in a graveyard, yet they are standing at the threshold of a whole new beginning.

The women witnessed Jesus' execution. They heard that Peter had disavowed Jesus. They watched as the other followers had scattered to the four winds. Just after dawn that first Easter morning, a messenger tells these women to step past what they know and find Peter—there's now a whiff of a new beginning! Find the other followers, too, the holy oracle tells the women. Go, find, and tell them that Jesus has gone ahead of you to Galilee. The place where things started is where Jesus meets his followers so they can begin again. Not repeat. Begin a brand new thing.

Jesus has gone ahead and prepares to meet us. One of our beloved teachers often said that Jesus dies ahead of us; not instead of us. Dr. Boumann would go on to say the risen Christ has already ascended into the future. Imagine that Jesus has already experienced the future and calls us toward it.

Sometimes the hardest thing to believe is a future—the enormity of war and famine reveal the darkest parts of our nature. Many of us fear that enough damage has been done to a fragile creation that we're bound for extinction. Maybe we are. Nevertheless, the Easter declaration is that unseen—before day break, God has rolled the stone away. A tomb that was supposed to contain Jesus body is empty. Now a risen Christ, who already has lived the future calls us onward and promises to walk next to us at the very same time.

The women at the tomb stand at the threshold of a beginning—a beginning that will lead to God only knows what. As we join with them there, we remember the very first words of Mark's Gospel: The beginning of the GOOD NEWS...of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. amen.