

THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS
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April 5, 2015
Easter Sunday
Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church

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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. 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 any one, for they were afraid.

And there ends not only the reading of the lesson; but there ends the gospel according to Mark.

They said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

Are you kiddin' me? That's how the story ends? Meet Jesus in Galilee. Really? That's it? Isn't Galilee where that long hard journey began in the first place? You mean we might have to walk this way with Jesus again?

They told no one, for they were afraid.

But then who would ever believe they were anything but crazy loons anyway. Yes, they saw an empty tomb. Big deal. What did it mean?

And that's our question as well. The tomb is empty. Jesus is alive in one form or another. So what? What does it mean?

They told no one. But the word got out.

Peter heard it and put away his sword and took up the servant's towel. St. Francis heard it and embraced a leper and a Muslim caliph. Teresa of Lisieux heard it. Sojourner Truth heard it. Elizabeth Cady Stanton heard it and devoted her life to abolish slavery and discrimination against women in this nation.

They told no one. But the word got out.

Gandhi heard it. Mother Maria of Paris heard it and took the place of a Jewish woman in the gas chamber. Maria died on Easter Sunday 1945, 70 years ago. Lutheran pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer heard it. Bonhoeffer wrote the universally acclaimed book, *The Cost of Discipleship*. The most famous sentence in that book is this: "When Jesus calls us, he bids us come and die."

Many Christians believe Jesus was a substitute on the cross for them when in fact Jesus invites us to participate. *Take up your cross and walk with me. It may bring you scorn, persecution and even death. But it will be worth it.*

You see, it's not about substitution. It's about participation. On April 9th, 1945, 70 years ago, Bonhoeffer was executed for the attempted assassination of Adolf Hitler.

They told no one. But the word got out.

Dorothy Day heard it and went to prison in 1917 for standing up for equal rights for women. Rachel Carson heard it. Nelson Mandela heard it. Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King heard it. Cesar Chavez and Oscar Romero heard it. Troy Perry heard it and formed the first ever LGBT-affirming church in the USA. Leyman Gbowee heard it and organized women to non-violently resist and stop a 10-year bloody civil war in Liberia.

They told no one. But the word got out.

Brian Willson heard it while serving in Vietnam in the US Air Force. He returned home with a transformed heart dedicated to non-violence and compassion for victims of war. On Sept. 1, 1987, he sat on the tracks outside Concord California Naval Weapons Station to protest the shipment of munitions to Central America. By previous agreement the train per usual would stop and allow for token arrests of Willson and other Vietnam Vets. But that day the train didn't stop. It deliberately sped up, slicing off both Willson's legs. He survived, barely, and to this day continues to stand up non-violently for victims of war, greed and discrimination.

They told no one. But the word got out.

Malala Yousafzai heard it. The Taliban shot her in the face. She survived and to this day, even under the threat of death, she continues to bring education and hope to young women in Pakistan.

They told no one. But the word got out.

Yes, hatred, violence and injustice are powerful. The Roman Empire and every empire before and since proved that. Empires crucify anyone who gets in their way.

Some empires are external; some internal. Tyranny and tyrants come in many forms. You may have one in your head or heart—demeaning, degrading and destroying you right now. Hatred is powerful.

But something else is true: there is another force in this world. It's the birthright of every human being. It's the gift of love and it is more powerful than anything.

In the Resurrection of Jesus that word got out.

The Resurrection of Jesus is not another version of the rites of spring, of life arising out of death, snow melting, flowers blooming, birds singing. That's the story of the natural world and it is marvelous and awesome. It is an enduring fact and should be celebrated in song and dance often and everywhere and not just Earth Day or May Day. That's a grand a glorious story.

But the Resurrection of Jesus tells a different story. It is a story of human choice and consequences. The Resurrection of Jesus, like beauty, may be in the eye and heart of the beholder. What is your heart's desire?

The Resurrection of Jesus is an invitation to believe and trust that love is the way, the truth and the life. The Resurrection of Jesus is an invitation to walk that way with all your heart, come what may, to love the world and others to death.

They told no one. But the word got out.

I don't know for sure but I have a feeling that the word got out this morning and someone here got it.