

Easter Sunday  
Wicker Park Lutheran Church  
Rev. Jason Glombicki  
April 1, 2018

Every three years, we hear the Resurrection story from Mark's gospel. This version is our earliest account. We can think of it as "the original" Resurrection story before Matthew, Luke, and John gave it their own spin. Mark originally ended the gospel just as we heard it today. Mark has no Resurrection appearances, and he doesn't even try to explain what happens next. It simply ends with three women leaving in silent amazement and terror. Woomp, woomp - what a letdown! After this entire story, we might wonder if it is an April fool's joke. One thing is for sure, it feels like a crappy ending.

When I think about people leaving in terror, I cannot help but think about the travesties we've seen. We've watched concert-goers and high school students flee in panic as bullets attempt to kill. Undocumented and documented immigrants watch their every move in fear for what might come next. The horror continues as tensions rise on the Korean peninsula, external factors impact our elections, and a bridge collapses on stopped traffic. Terror is pervasive.

Yet, today's Resurrection story is not only one of terror; rather, it's a story of terror *and* amazement. At first glance it might be hard to imagine how these two things can be held together. We might wonder, how someone can be overcome with extreme fear and great wonder at the same time.

To understand what's going on, we'll want to remember what these women brought to the tomb. If you recall from last week's episode, it was these same women who followed Jesus and provided for him in Galilee. Although the twelve male disciples get a whole lot of credit, women, many women, droves of women gathered with Jesus to advocate for change. So, imagine these same women at the tomb with their complex grief. Sure, they mourned the obvious pain and loss at Jesus's death. But, they also had to make peace with the end of Jesus's dream. It was a dream where God's worldview would rule. A vision where violence would be exchanged for love. The hope that pride would be replaced with service. The wish for healing, understanding, and life to become the dominate narrative.

These women came bearing all of that. They gathered to grieve the loss of their friend; they came to mourn the loss of their future; and they mobilized to worship their grief. While I cannot begin to imagine their experience, I can relate to feelings of terror and amazement.

There we were about thirty minutes from landing. It was a dark, windy night in Chicago. Our flight had been filled with literal ups and downs, along with numerous announcements for the flight attendants to "buckle up for a bumpy ride" (my words, not theirs). We finally heard the familiar chime that landing was imminent. As we began our approach to the airport, the wind was blowing hard, and I began praying even harder. As we rapidly descended over the Kennedy Expressway, my phone vibrated, and I glanced at the screen. The notification read: "Don't forget, you're going to die." Seriously? That was *not* the time!

You see, days before on vacation, I installed an app on my phone that reminds me five times each day that I am going to die. Yes, it's an odd thing to install, especially on a vacation, but I'm a pastor and we're an odd breed. The app is similar to Mark's gospel in that it doesn't mince words or sugar-coat reality, instead it simply reminds me that death is a sure thing.

While I didn't appreciate the timing of the notification on that flight, I have come to welcome its simple message. Instead of only informing me of my maggot-infested future, these reminders have given me life. Like when I fall into the temptation to overwork and I get a reminder that life is short, or when I'm stressing about a flooded church basement and I recall that *nothing* is permanent. Another buzz reminds me that life is not assumed, so call your mom back already. Those notifications shock my reality and call me to ponder my humdrum. While the app has consistently indicated that the unknown terror of death is lurking, in my response, I've discovered wonder in refocusing my life.

You see, this pithy story helps me to better understand those women at the tomb. If Jesus is waiting for them in Galilee, it's terrifying to think they're going to have to continue in a life filled with endless reminders of death, violence, and pride after they *just* witnessed his execution. Yet, at the same time, there is utter amazement in thinking that maybe, just maybe, God's worldview could become their reality.

While you might not have an app to remind you of death nor will we ever be able to understand the feelings of these women, I imagine that you can connect with terror and amazement. Maybe it was at your child's birth when you were filled with sheer terror about what to do with the little one and at the same time pure amazement at what the future might hold. Perhaps it is a new diagnosis that worries you about the future but at the same time finally explains your experience. It could be a brand-new home, significant other, or a job. There are endless places where we come to experience that two-sided coin of terror and amazement.

That's the thing about new life and resurrection, it isn't all rainbows and butterflies. Sure, we can doctor-up that two-sided coin with lilies, brass, and shouts of "alleluia," but resurrection is still

chilling and astounding. And that two-sided experience is a quintessential theophany, and a theophany is just a fancy way of saying an experience of God's visible appearance. You see, terror and amazement often lead to silence – the same silence that enveloped those three women on that first Easter. In that abrupt silence, we find ourselves reflecting and evaluating.

For most of you, it wasn't a surprise that Jesus was nowhere to be seen this morning. Yet, just as that holy messenger invited those women, we are invited to pause and assess. From the first sentence of Mark's gospel, evaluation and reflection have been the author's goal. Mark's intention was to communicate the "beginning" of the good news of Jesus. Now, at the end of Mark, we better understand that the good news is *still* only beginning to be known. For, we are encouraged to learn from Jesus in more than an intellectual manner. Instead, we're sent to learn and respond with our full selves following his example. So that we might learn that love is the antivenin to violence and that serving is the cure for pride, and that when love and service seem like a dead-end, in Christ's example we discover a pathway to life.

So, on this day, we show up as God's people to reflect and review. We come to learn of Christ's example and get a taste of life. With a diversity of people, we flock to be nourished at this table, knowing that God's love has been given without exception. We gather to celebrate our God's acts in both terror *and* amazement. Thanks be to God, Alleluia!