

# “What if Easter did not Come?”

Mark 16:1-8

April 12, 2009

Sometimes it seems as though mere words fail to capture the moment. We have heard the story so often and it has become so deeply embedded in our culture that it becomes little more than an occasion for Ham dinner with the family and hunting for Easter eggs. We have just announced the most remarkable - seemingly impossible - almost unbelievable [in fact -impossibly unbelievable to some] - inconceivable conclusion to a life lived, a life that moved, as all life does to death. The amazing grace of God broke open the tomb of Jesus to reveal that He was no longer in the grip of death. Resurrection happens ..... And we will sit on our hands because it is old news .... We will not get too excited about the whole thing because, after all it is just that old ‘church’ story and we have a lot of other things going on in our lives that are really important and pressing.

But I want to suggest to you that there is nothing that is more important. The notion that ‘resurrection’ can happen affects every aspect of our lives. This morning I would invite you to ask yourselves one simple little question ..... What if there was no Easter? - what if ‘resurrection’ was not possible?

I read recently that Thomas Jefferson held some interesting religious beliefs. Some apparently accused him of being an atheist but others suggest that he just held some very untraditional beliefs. When it came to Jesus and the Easter story, he had serious reservations when it came to the resurrection. Jefferson, the rationalist, could not accept scripture's miraculous events, so he edited his own version of the New Testament with all supernatural references removed. The emphasis in Jefferson's Bible was on moral teachings: Jesus is an eastern sage, teaching kindness and justice. A lot of people are willing to go that far - but not a lot farther. Jefferson's rewrite of the gospel account closes with these words: "There laid they Jesus and rolled a great stone at the mouth of the sepulcher and departed."

Amen. That's it. The end of the story. What if Easter did not come?

Mark's account of the resurrection is one that is perhaps read the least. It is very brief and ends before we want it to end. If you look at your Bibles sometime you will find that there is a note that says that some ancient manuscripts also include a section beyond the ending that we have printed as our text today. Many believe that there was a scribe that was not satisfied with the ending as we have it and added on some additional material. As we have it, there are a few women who go early to the tomb with spices to anoint the body of Jesus. They expect to find death but find life instead. But they are so surprised by the whole thing that even though Jesus tells them to go with the good news to the disciples, they are filled with terror and amazement - and, at least for a time, tell no one.

Often times, it seems as though we are like that. We expect death - we expect the

worst ..... And we live gloomy lives unwilling to shout good news. It would be understandable if Easter never came. It would be one thing if in our lives we never saw life return after death. But we see it over and over. We know that Easter will and does come. Knowing that - believing that without question has to reshape our lives.

What if Easter did not come? What a different and desperate life we would have to live. Think about all that you experience in your life. Imagine how different your life would have to be if you really believed that life would not come again. Imagine if you watched the leaves falling from the trees last fall and came to believe that the trees would never spring to life again - what desperate sorrow would accompany the falling of every leaf. What if we really believe that our North Dakota winter would never give way to spring and summer. Sometimes when it drags on and has been more difficult than many it is easy to begin to feel the weight of a seemingly unending winter. I heard again this weekend someone question if the ice would be off the lake by the 4th of July. I have heard myself question whether the wind, cold & blizzards of winter would ever be over and I have felt the hollowness of being unable to imagine dealing with any more blowing snow and biting cold. Imagine living up north in the 'land of the midnight sun'. It is one thing when the sun never sets but then there is also that season when the sun never rises. Imagine entering into that season when the sun does not rise and believing that it will never rise again. Imagine if you and a best friend had an argument - saying terrible hateful words to each other and walking away ..... Imagine coming to believe that the relationship would never be revived. I could imagine a million different scenarios that we can encounter in life that could be debilitating if we didn't know that those little deaths give way to life. Life does or at least can return, deep in our soul we know that - sometimes suddenly or when we least expect it - sometimes we must wait long as we watch for it to happen - but all around us little 'Easters' happen. And because we know that, we are basically hopeful people. Like the young boy playing softball who told the stranger that the game score was 18 to nothing. When asked if he was discouraged, he was surprised by the question and simply said: 'Of course not, we haven't even been up to bat yet.' Resurrections happen!

Over and over we see it - darkness gives way to light. The cold will flee as the heat of the summer comes. Relationships can be restored. Illness can give way to health. Little Easter experiences that give us hope to live life. But today's good news trumps all of our little Easter moments. The real Easter good news is the most unexpected - most unlikely - most improbable event ever. But the power of God comes to the tomb as well. If it is true - then nothing can be hopeless. Still one author wrote: I am suspicious that you and I are like those women. Even though we have heard the promises of God. Yes, we have heard the promises over and over again e.g. on the third day I will rise; today you will be with me in paradise; I am the resurrection and the life. We have heard these promises but we come to our graves, and like the women on that first Sunday morning, we are expecting death. For deep down in everyone's soul is a pessimism that believes that this is all there is. They put you in a box; they put you in that grave; and in time the box and the vault will decay, and your body will decay like all the others. If Easter did not come that would be all there is. If Easter did not happen than all of the little Easter experiences that have shaped our lives lead nowhere but to one final defeat. But in fact, Easter comes and life breaks in - even upon death. And that turns around all of the remaining 'deaths' for which we could not see a resurrection. Christ is risen and every dead end opens up.

Christ is risen and ultimately we encounter all things with hope - no door is so firmly closed that God can not open it. Today we celebrate. That's good stuff. But the great news is that it means that everyday is lived in hopeful expectation.

AMEN