



SAINT ANDREW'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

306 N. Division Street, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48104 • (734) 663-0518 • www.standrewsaa.org

Sermon for Sunday, April 1, 2018

Easter Day

FR. ALAN GIBSON

Acts 10:34-43 | Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24 | 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 | Mark 16:1-8

Is this some kind of cruel April Fool's joke? Shouldn't there be some joy and happiness? Where is the triumphant end of the story? Where is Jesus? In these last words from St. Mark's gospel we are in front of an empty tomb with an angel, and three women running for their lives because, "they were afraid." Is that why we're here this morning? To be frightened?

The women came to Jesus' tomb expecting nothing fearful, just familiar tragedy. They sought only to complete the burial rites that were cut short due to the obligations of the Passover observance. Friday night and all day Saturday had been taken up with the required annual religious rituals. But it's doubtful these women entered into this time with much enthusiasm. Mark gives us a hint of the urgency they felt while waiting for the conclusion of the festival. As soon as the sun went down on Saturday, as soon as the day of rest was over, the women went out to the reopened market to buy the spices and oils used in burying the dead. But they did not go out to the tomb that night. It was too late, too dangerous to be roaming around outside the city after dark. So at first light Sunday morning, the three women who had faithfully followed Jesus throughout his ministry, slipped out through the city gate and made their way to what was meant to be his final resting place. But the body of Jesus was not there, only an angel who tries, but fails, to calm them with the news that their friend and teacher has risen from the dead.

After the horrible events of Friday afternoon, no one expected anything from Jesus. They had put his promise out of their minds, only to have it slam into them, and stop their hearts on Sunday morning. Jesus had done exactly what he said he would do.

St. Mark treats the details of the resurrection as an afterthought. Eight short verses tell of the event that changed the nature of life and death. A cosmic struggle between heaven and hell had taken place. The power of the grave is smashed and new life is offered to all who would embrace it. All of this, and the only recorded reaction is fear. The End. Mark put his pen down, there. Of course that's not the end of the story. Mark knew there was more, or else he would never

have written his gospel. But by stopping where he does, Mark is perhaps the most realistic of the Evangelists when it comes to conveying the true nature of this day.

If our first look at the empty tomb does not put fear into our hearts then we haven't fully understood what happened on that first Easter morning, or what it means for us now. Christ's resurrection exposes death for what it is: the perversion of God's plan and power. The risen Christ brings death into the light, where it dies, and where it can't harm anyone, ever again.

Did the women run from the tomb because the angel spooked them? Or did they run because they realized everything Jesus had said was true and their world, as they knew it, was coming to an end? They had been with God, they had seen God, touched God, shared a life with God. Their religion had taught them that no one can do these things and live. They were brought up to believe that an encounter with God is the most fearful thing a person can experience. Yet there they are, still standing.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ puts God in our face. How could we not be afraid? That's Mark's point. He didn't have to write about the joy and the triumph of the resurrection; we can find that on our own. It would come whether Mark wrote about it, or not. But if we hold Christ's promise of new life to be true, then that means the old life has to die. We have to face the sight, and the fear, of the tomb -- a tomb that could have been ours, but isn't. Jesus emptied death of its power, as empty as his tomb is. Once we get a good look at that emptiness, we have no need to fear it, or anything, anymore.