
It Sure Has Been A Long Three Days in the Tomb

**A sermon by the Very Rev. Sam Candler
Easter Day – Year B**

“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.” (Mark 16:8)

It sure has been a long three days in the tomb. It sure has been a long three days in the tomb!

It was only three days ago. Maybe a year ago, around March 13, in the year 2020, when the world suddenly stopped. We stopped driving. We stopped going out. We stopped shaking hands. We stopped hugging. Many of us stopped working. Some of us stopped going to school. Some of us stopped breathing. Some of us stopped loving. Life stopped.

All this, this past year, might be what a tomb is like. To be dead, and yet somehow aware of our death. In the tomb. Aware, and numb. Unable to move. Often unable to speak. Unable to touch. Unable to breathe.

And, unable, disempowered, to make decisions for ourselves. At the mercy of people above us. At the will of people above us. At the mercy of people making decisions for us, about whether we can go to our office, whether we can go to our schools, whether we can go to our churches, whether we can open our restaurant, whether we can sing with other people.

To be in the tomb means having our agency taken away from us. Having our wills taken from us. It has been stifling. The tomb is a deadly place.

In the tomb, the only good news is that Jesus is not there. That’s what the young man told the women who showed up early in the morning after the sabbath. “Do not be alarmed,” he said, “you seek Jesus of Nazareth. He’s not here. He was here. There’s the place where they laid him. But he’s not here anymore. Go! Tell everybody that he is going ahead of you, out into the world. There, there you will see him, just as he said.”

There is a way out! Jesus said, “Behold, I am going before you!”

Oh, how we need this kind of leader, the one who goes with us, and before us. The one who enters the tomb with us, and the one who also gets out of the tomb, before us!

We need this kind of leader. In this past year, we’ve spent a lot of time looking for leaders, haven’t we? Some of us like this guy, some that guy, some of us like this woman, some that woman.

Today, on Easter, the Day of Resurrection, we realize that every human leader falls short. No matter which part of the political spectrum we focus on, we get mesmerized, maybe even brainwashed, thinking that our choice is perfect and pure. But no human leader is perfect and pure. They all leave something, something to be desired. Humans will inevitably fail. Humans, all of us, end up in the tomb.

Those of you who know the Bible, you probably know that the Gospel of Mark is the shortest of the four gospels. But it also has a fascinating feature. Or lack of a feature, maybe.

The Gospel of Mark is the only gospel that does not contain a resurrection appearance of Jesus. Instead, the Gospel of Mark contains only the news of Jesus’ absence. It is here at chapter 16.

Every few years, the church reads this account on Easter. Every third year in our lectionary cycle, we don't read Matthew, Luke, or John on Easter morning. We read this one, from Mark. The one where Jesus does not show up.

Oh, most of our bibles do have some closing verses of Mark, verses 9 through 20, 12 more verses. Some of your Bibles have those verses in parentheses. Because each of them is a quick little summary of a resurrection appearance that is told in a much longer way elsewhere, in Matthew or Luke or John. It's weird. It is very probably the case that this longer, parenthetical, ending of Mark was tacked on, much later, after the other gospels had been written.

So, the true ending of Mark, maybe the original ending, ends with amazement and fear. Mary, and even Peter, have heard about the news, about the absence, but they sure haven't seen it yet!

It's good that this year, 2021, is a year in which we read Mark. This year, we hear that Jesus has been raised, but he might not have shown up to us, yet. We haven't seen him yet.

So it is this Easter, for us. We are still in a tomb, still wearing our masks for safety and caution. Still wearing these masks that look like burial cloths. Still unable to move about freely, still unable to make decisions for ourselves. Still numb, unable to touch and feel.

There is a young man sitting before us in this empty tomb, telling us that, "Jesus of Nazareth 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." (Mk 16:6-7).

Some people who have puzzled over this abrupt ending to the Gospel of Mark have suggested a reason. The reason that Mark does not present a resurrection appearance of Jesus in his gospel is because he wants the reader to be the resurrection appearance. He wants the person reading the gospel to realize that, hey, there is no Jesus here, because I am supposed to be the resurrection appearance of Jesus. Because **WE** are supposed to be the resurrection appearance of Jesus!

Wow.

I believe that.

It's us. We are the ones who are supposed to be Jesus, in the resurrection. We are the ones who are supposed to come out of our tombs and hug our relatives again. Have dinner with friends. Serve and touch those in need. Feed the poor. Touch, touch, touch.

Of course, it's not happening fully yet. It's happening gradually though, isn't it? I was with two grandparents a week or so ago, both of whom had been vaccinated, and they were able to hug their grandchildren for the first time in a year. That was joy. That was the joy of resurrection!

Gradually, it is happening again. Resurrection is happening again!

It's not here completely yet. It's not here for all of us yet. Some people may be immune to COVID-19 now, because they have already survived it. Some people may be fully vaccinated now. But, definitely not all of us. And the resurrection will not be real, until it is real for everyone. The resurrection will not be real until **EVERYONE** has been vaccinated against death!

No one gets to experience resurrection completely until everyone – Everyone!—has experienced resurrection! It doesn't matter who is first, just like it doesn't matter who was first to see Jesus in the gospels! It doesn't matter because Jesus has not been fully seen, until everyone, everyone, has seen Jesus.

In fact, according to the Gospel of Mark, what matters is not our seeing Jesus! What matters is our being Jesus! It is not seeing Jesus that matters! It is our being Jesus that matters. What matters is being Jesus to other people. What matters is being resurrection to other people. Giving people life and breath! Giving people control of their lives again! Giving people agency again! Loving people in the fullness of hugging and kissing again!

That is resurrection.

And it is coming. We are like those early witnesses at the empty tomb. What they witnessed was not Jesus. What they witnessed was his absence! And we, today, don't see full resurrection yet. We don't see it completely yet. But we know it is coming!

Go, tell everybody, said the guy at the empty tomb. Jesus is going ahead of you, just as he said he would. Out in the world. There, there, you will see him.

“So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them.” The Gospel of Mark says they said nothing to anyone. But, of course, they did tell! We wouldn’t be here today, if they had not said anything. (Somehow, the Gospel of Mark is always saying “be quiet,” despite the irony that it is also shouting good news to everyone, at the same time!)

It sure has been a long three days in the tomb. It’s time to get up. Today, we celebrate that Jesus is no longer in the tomb. So, we are free, too. We are free to follow Jesus away from the tomb, and into the world of new life and resurrection. The fullness of that resurrection, the fullness of our restoration to life, is not here, yet! We must still be cautious and careful, for sure. But, resurrection is coming. And even though every human leader has her or his failings, yet every one of us human beings is also empowered to be Jesus in the world. In the fullness of Easter, in the fullness of time, every one of us is supposed to be the resurrected Jesus in the world.

Christ is risen. Christ is risen, today, in you! And you, and you, and you!

Alleluia, Christ is risen in you!

Thanks be to God. Alleluia!

AMEN.

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