Easter

April 12, 2020

Matthew 28:1-10

 The Bible offers us 4 versions of the story of Jesus’s life, which means 4 versions of the story of his death and resurrection.

 The evangelists tell their stories differently, because that’s what we do. If four of us witnessed the same thing, the chances are quite good we’d have 4 different versions of the story. Just watch any crime drama on TV and you’ll see this played out in witness accounts. Each of us would remember different details, perhaps we’d remember things in a different order. Each of us would think certain parts were more important than others. If we were telling our stories to different audiences, as the evangelists did, that would influence how we crafted our tale.

 These four different versions are a gift. They help us get a fuller picture of who Jesus was and what he did. We do the evangelists and their story a disservice when we try to mush the four accounts together, weed out the differences, so all we have are similarities.

 That said, there’s one similarity found in all four stories that has always struck me as a interesting detail.

 Only one person is mentioned in all four Gospels as being at the tomb on that first Easter – Mary Magdalene. For this, she is sometimes called the Apostle to the Apostles, the Evangelist to the Apostles, for she is the one who, regardless of which of the four Gospels you read, is there to witness the empty tomb. She’s there to hear that Jesus has risen. And she is told to go tell the others.

 I’ve often wondered why Mary and the other women went to the tomb that day. Matthew and John don’t offer an explanation for the journey, while Luke and Mark say they took spices with them that they intended to use to properly prepare Jesus’ body for burial.

 I suspect that Mary Magdalene was motivated by her faith, that, having observed the Sabbath, she intended to honor the memory of her friend, her teacher, by visiting his tomb. The Jewish people have a well-structured system for mourning a person’s death, and perhaps she was just engaging in that process as Luke and Mark suggest.

No doubt she was sad, deeply sad, grieving the loss of her friend and teacher.

Maybe she just didn’t know what to do with herself, how to return to normal without Jesus.

 Regardless of what she intended to do upon arrival at the tomb, and even if she remembered at all that Jesus had said he would die but be raised after 3 days, nothing prepared her for what she experienced.

 Matthew tells us there was an earthquake and an angel of the Lord descended from heaven right in front of her, rolled the stone away from the tomb, and sat on the stone. And the angel didn’t look like the statues and figurines of angels we usually see, but his appearance was like lightning and his clothing as white as snow.

 Nothing can prepare you for that.

 What mattered was her response. Would she accept what she had seen, believe it was true, and share the good news?

 There’s one other thing that the Gospels share: None of them try to explain what happened on that first Easter. They just tell the story and get out of the way. They don’t offer theological explanations of what it means to us. They don’t try to explain how God made it happen, as if they could possibly do such a thing.

They just say, “This is what happened that morning, and this is what Mary Magdalene, and whoever else was with her or whoever she told, did in response.”

 After all, how can you explain a miracle? You either believe it happened or you don’t. Because Mary believed and obeyed Jesus’ command to tell the others, we are here today to share our faith in what she told the others – that Jesus, who had died and was buried, was now alive. That God had conquered death.

 And because of that, we have hope, even in a broken, hurting world.

 Whatever her intentions, that Sunday didn’t go the way Mary Magdalene thought it would. That first Easter was not at all what she expected.

 I think we can relate to that today. This is not how we expected to spend this Sunday. This Easter is not what we imagined it would be.

 **But it’s Easter anyway.**

 This building may be empty, **but so is the tomb.** Christ is risen. And we are called upon to live as Easter people.

 In his epistle to the Colossians, Paul insists that the resurrection should matter to us, should make a difference in our lives. If we believe it happened, we should act like it, so that everything we do and say reflects who we are and whose we are – beloved children of God, who are given the gift of salvation and mercy from a God who loves us more than we can possibly know.

 Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!