

A Sermon for Dayspring Baptist Church
By Chris Fillingham
“Message From The Tomb”
Easter Sunday
Mark 16:1-8
March 27, 2016

I can't help but wonder what the last few days have been like for the disciples. What were they thinking? How were they feeling the night after the crucifixion? How were they feeling a day later?

When Jesus was arrested they all deserted him. They fled in fear. Once they saw what happened were they glad they saved their own skin? Maybe.

Are they still scared for their own lives? Are they angry? Are they disappointed in themselves? ...maybe disappointed in Jesus?

I especially wonder about Peter... what it was like for him a day after he denied Jesus. I imagine there was the deep and profound sorrow over what happened to Jesus.

And maybe mixed in with that was this *overwhelming guilt*... that *he* of all the disciples, had deserted Jesus. And even worse, he had denied even knowing Jesus in the moment of Jesus' greatest need.

He'd promised not to do that.

He swore with a solemn oath that he would always be faithful, till death do they part. But in a moment of weakness... or in a moment where he forgot himself, he did it.

And I wonder what he's been feeling since:

Deep regret?

Shame?

Lost and *utterly alone*?

Some of all of it, probably. He didn't just lose Jesus that night, you know. He lost all his friends, his whole community. How could he possibly show his face again to the other disciples?

He was supposed to be their leader.

He was supposed to set the example.

He was supposed to get it right, even if they didn't.

He was supposed to be close and connected to Jesus's own heart.

But... I guess a lot didn't go how it was “**supposed to**” go, did it? Not as far as Peter was concerned. I mean, Jesus wasn't “supposed to” die.

Evil wasn't supposed to win... again.

Things weren't “supposed to” end up this way.

None of this was “supposed to happen” ...

You know the feeling right?

And I imagine Peter.... doesn't know what to do now.
Maybe he's shut down, hiding in his dark room, unable to face the world.
Maybe he's not at home at all. Maybe he's hitting the bottle in some bar because he can't handle going home and seeing his family's faces.

We don't know what things have been like for Peter the last few days. The last we heard of him, he fled into the night weeping bitterly because he realize he'd just betrayed the one he loved.

So, wherever Peter is, I imagine his eyes are still bloodshot and he is numb... the way you are after you've cried every last tear in your body, but it's still not enough.

And how could his tears ever be enough?
How could his "I'm sorry's" day after day ever be enough?
How will he ever prove to anyone.... and especially prove to *himself* that he is something other than a complete disappointment and failure...
... a failure to the world,
... a failure to his friends,
... a failure... to **God**.
That's how it must have seemed to Peter, anyway...

Which is what makes the message at the tomb so beautiful and so very striking, especially the way Mark tells it. The women show up to finish the burying process only to find an empty tomb. And there is a young man there, dressed in white, with a smile on his face...

In rapid fire succession, without giving any details, he tells them that Jesus isn't there. He's been raised. See, here's the place they laid his body. Now go and tell the disciples... *especially Peter...*

It's the one extra bit of detail that Mark includes that none of the other gospel writers pick up on. "Go and tell the disciples... *especially Peter...*"

Make sure Peter hears. Jesus is raised from the dead. He is going to meet them in Galilee... all of them... even Peter.

God wanted to make sure that Peter got this message. Wherever he is. Whatever he's thinking, God wants to make sure Peter, of all people, knows:

Resurrection is happening.

Life and healing is breaking into the tombs of death, and rolling away the stones. And now, all things are being made new, Peter, all things... even you.

This news is for Peter... and it's for you... and it's for me. It's for all of us who have carried guilt along the way. For all of us who has had the stone of shame and death roll across our path, ending the road we were on. For all of us, who are failed disciples,

For all of who have hurt and disappointed those we love,

This news is for us all.

Jesus is risen. And his resurrection life is coming to meet you.

***Which is to say, your great failing,
your deepest regret,
the wounds you caused to those you love
and the pain you now carry...
is not the end of the story.
It doesn't get the last word.***

This is the great meaning of Easter. It's the message given at the empty tomb.

One of the ancient Church Fathers, John Chrysostom, put it this way back in the 4th century: ***"Let no one weep for their sins. Forgiveness has risen from the tomb."***

Because of Easter,

You don't have to live trapped by your shame any longer.

Because of Easter,

You don't have to be defined by your sin anymore.

Yes, you have been a great desperate screw up... and God knows, so have I, but the One who knows your deepest wounds and your darkest secrets is risen from the dead. And on this Easter morning he is saying to you, ***"I have been resurrected, so that you might have new life. You no longer have to be defined by what happened in the darkness of night."***

Forgiveness has risen from the tomb.

Even you are beloved.

Even you can be made new.

That's the message at the empty tomb. It's the message the women are entrusted with. ***"Go and tell the disciples, especially Peter..."*** they are told.

But they don't.

At least not according to Mark. Because Mark actually ends in vs 8. All that other stuff was added later by scribes that didn't like Mark's ending. They didn't like the women keeping silent.

But according to Mark, those who heard this message were terrified, and they fled, and they didn't say a word to anyone because they were afraid.

The End.

Not a very Easter-y ending is it? Peter doesn't get to hear the news. The disciples don't hear. They're all left in the dark. It's almost as if Mark is trying to make you squirm in your seat. He's almost making us say, ***"Wait a minute, that isn't right, is it? That's not how the story is supposed to go."***

It's like getting to the end of the Harry Potter series...
and Vuldermolt wins.
Or getting to the end of Downton Abby...
and Edith really does end up sad and alone for the rest of her life.

That's not how it's supposed to go.

But Mark is up to something here. Remember there is real artistry in the way the Gospels were written. He wants us to know, that this very well could be the end of the story... because it has been for some. Not all the disciples got to hear the news of the resurrection.

Judas sure didn't.

After Judas saw what happened to Jesus, he was overcome with sorrow and regret. First he tries to give the money back. Acts says he bought a field, and tripped and fell, and his guts burst open. Judas died alone in a field of blood...

He died with his guts spilling out in deep regret,
knowing he was a wretched sinner,
sure God wanted nothing to do him.

There was no Easter for Judas. No resurrection message for him. No light breaking into the darkness. He never heard the message of the empty tomb.

But is what he did really so unforgivable? As Nadia Boltz-Weber asks, **“How is it that Judas, who betrayed Jesus once and then deeply regretted it becomes the villain, while Peter, who denied Jesus three times and wept bitterly, becomes the rock on which the church is built? When it comes down to it, what's the difference between Peter and Judas?”**¹

Nothing really.

Nothing except Judas ends up all alone, and ends any possibility of hearing God's grace. So, he carried the burden of guilt to his grave, because he left the community before he had a chance to hear it.

He went out on his own. Judas ears never received a word of forgiveness or a word of healing, because that's the one thing a sinner can never create for him or herself.

By ourselves, on our own, it is next to impossible to hear or know the beautiful, radicle grace that flows from the heart of God to God's broken and blessed humanity.

Sure, there are a lot of things we can create for ourselves:
entertainment, fun,
maybe even positive self-talk,
warm fuzzy feelings out in nature.

¹ Nadia Boltz-Weber, *Accidental Saints*, 165. The following reflections on Judas are inspired by her chapter “Judas Will Now Take Your Confession,” 163-172.

***But the one thing we cannot create for ourselves is God's word of Grace to us.
We have to have a community for that.
We have hear it from one another.***

Which also means, we have to tell it to each other.

So, maybe Judas choose death a little too soon. I can't help but wonder what might have happened if he stuck around long enough to hear the Easter news for himself...

the news from the tomb: **"Yes, you are a screwed up sinner. Yes, you've made a mess of your life and a mess of our world around you. Now come as the sinner you are to a God who loves you and offers you forgiveness."**

How might the Church have been different, if Judas had received forgiveness like the rest of them? After all, Jesus told his disciples over and over again to preach forgiveness in his name. What might have happened if they did just that... even to Judas.

I'm sure it would have been terribly difficult, and uncomfortable. In fact, it's a lot easier to just identify Judas as the problem. *Judas* the traitor... not us.

It's a lot easier to do exactly what the woman did, leave the tomb with all your amazement drowned out by your fear of sharing the message...

to leave the empty tomb today and keep silent.

It makes me wonder if Judas' community failed him because they *didn't* go to find him. If they did, I hope they confessed their sin... and I hope they heard the word of Grace spoken back to them... the word of forgiveness that there were charged with sharing,

because they needed it
and you need it,
and trust me, I need it too.

That's why all of us who are here this day, all of us who have come to the empty tomb have been given the same task that the women were given. All of us are sent with the same message. **"Let no one weep for their sins. Forgiveness has raised from the tomb."** That's the message we are all given to share.

It's really that simple. That all that preaching the gospel is. If you think you don't know what to say, or how to say it, then learn just this simple line, **"You are a child of God. You are forgiven, and you are loved"**

This is the message we are to speak, to one another. It's the message that makes all of us preachers of the gospel. **"You are a child of God. You are forgiven, and you are loved."**

Go and tell the disciples, especially Peter... and Judas... and your loved one that so desperately needs to hear it. **"You are a child of God. You are forgiven, and you are loved."**

And then make sure you come back here to hear it again for yourself. Because you need to hear it too, and not just today, but week after week...
because our memories are short,
and our sins keep piling up,
and trying to remember the word of forgiveness on our own, just isn't going to be enough.

We need to hear it again today. So, in a moment you're going to be invited to the table to hear the news again. And I want to invite you ***to come with your churning gut ready to spill out.***

come because you are hungry for the truth to be spoken again.

You are invited to receive this,
because you are a Child of God.

Come and encounter the God who leaves heaven to get dirty with the pain and the beauty of humanity.

Come and encounter the God who climbs out of the grave to offer you his resurrection body.

Come and receive the forgiveness and the love of God that is here for you.

You are a child of God.

You are beloved.

And today is Easter.

Forgiveness is risen from the tomb

So come, and receive the gift of God,

and be made new.

Amen.