

They said nothing to anyone because they were afraid.  
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Easter 2018

“So 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.”

Yes that is how the Gospel of Mark ends. There are alternate endings, but those were added probably much later. Mark ends with the women running from the tomb and saying nothing to anyone, for they were afraid. How is this possible you might ask? This certainly isn't the way we like to think of what happened. In John we have Mary Magdalene running back to tell the disciples, but wait, where were the disciples and what were they doing that first Easter morning?

Well according to the Gospel of John, which was our alternate reading this morning they were hiding behind locked doors for fear of the Jewish leaders. That isn't much better than what the women in Mark's gospel do is it?

Fear is a powerful motivator. Fear can cause us to react in ways that may not really be what we wanted or intended. I have been reading a book about fear that our Thursday night book group is going to discuss. The title is Following Jesus in a Culture of fear. In this book the author talks about our culture that markets all kinds of things using fear. Fear of not fitting in, fear of not being popular or attractive. Often it is a message of fearing not having enough. Think about those ads for the many types of retirement accounts and the ominous voice over, “will you have enough to retire?”

Friday I had gone down to visit someone at a hospital. I'll not say which one and it doesn't matter anyway. I was walking out the door and this man says to me, “Well Father, did you hear that hell doesn't exist?” By the way I happened to be wearing one of my short sleeve shirts where I have a roman collar like catholic priests so he just assumed. “Yep, it was in the paper today. The pope said hell doesn't exist. Can you imagine that?”

Of course any of you who know me well know that I can in fact imagine that the God of love that I preach would not send anybody to eternal punishment for something done in this life. Now when I got back to my study I went looking for the article he mentioned and as of Friday afternoon I have not found it and I sincerely doubt it was a true story. The point is that this person was upset at the possibility that hell didn't exist! He wanted hell to exist for whatever reason. I have found this true of many Christians. They want a God who punishes, they want to be assured that they are part of the in crowd.

Much of Christianity sells religion with fear as well. Fear of God and fear of hell has certainly for centuries been the major selling point of our faith. Believe in Jesus and you get to go to heaven. Everybody else, well we know what happens to them. That just isn't selling any more in our world. It isn't selling to young people and it really isn't selling for people of any age. I constantly run into this. We are baptizing four people this morning and whenever I am talking to people about baptism I use a line I learned from the Rev. Stephen McWhorter at St. David's in Ashburn Virginia. He would sit down with parents and say, "Now why do you want this child to be baptized. If you are looking for holy fire insurance, I'm not in the insurance business." Baptism is not about escaping hell it is about following Jesus and making sure that the child you baptize will be raised to follow Jesus. Presenting a child for baptism means that the parents are committing to raising the child as a practicing Christian. Asking to be baptized as an adult is a commitment to living your life as a Christian according to the promises of the baptismal covenant that we will all say together later in this service.

So what is that message that we have to spread to all corners of the world? There is a powerful message and our Presiding Bishop had some very strong thoughts on that in his Easter message. He spent Holy Week in Jerusalem at St. George's college the same place I spent part of my sabbatical.

"Hatred does not have the last word," the Presiding Bishop said. "But on that third day after the crucifixion, when by the titanic power of God, by the power of the love of God, Jesus was raised from the dead. God sent a message and declared that death does not have the last word. Hatred does not have the last word. Violence does not have the last word. Bigotry does not have the last word. Sin, evil do not have the last word. The last word is God, and God is love.

The truth is the message of Jesus was unsettling to the world then as it is unsettling to the world now. And yet that very message is the only source of hope in life for the way of the cross, the way of unselfish living, the way of sacrificial living, seeking the good, the welfare of the other before one's own unenlightened self-interest. That way of the cross is the way of love. That is the nature of love. And that way is the only hope for the entire human family."

The reality is the way of Jesus is a threat to the way that the world is, and hope for the way the world can and will be."

You see the message I want you all to take from here today is the message of a God who loved the world so much that he sent his only son not to change God's mind about us, but to change our minds about God. To realize that God is not an angry old man demanding sacrifice, but a loving father who desires nothing more than that his children live in the love that God has for us.

At the end of the gospel from John on Maundy Thursday is the final commandment that Jesus give to the disciples. "I give you one more commandment. That you have love for one another. Just as I have loved you, you should have love for one another." Then the a really important line, "By this everyone will know you are my disciples if you have love for one another." There it is. A commandment both simple and so very hard to actually live, but that's the message we need to take out into the world.

Not a message of fear, but one of love. The love that God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit show us each and everyday without stop even when we do not realize it. So do not leave these doors today and remain silent like the women. Do not hide behind locked doors for fear of what others may say. Do not keep this good news to yourself. The world needs this message of love probably more now than at any time in the history of the world.

So what will you do when you walk out the door of this church today? I think the dismissal from the Eucharist at the Evangelism Matters conference that I was at in Cleveland a couple weeks ago says it well. As you listen please notice that this is a command to go. I will use it later this morning but here it is:

Go forth in the Name of Christ:  
Go into your own Neighborhoods.  
Go into unknown lands and places.  
Go where God's name is well  
Known and where it has yet to be known.  
Go to those who welcome you and to those who reject you.  
Go forth into the world and share the  
Good News of God's love.