

Conley Memorial Presbyterian Church, Easter Sunday, April 5, 2015

Same Old, Same Old
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April 5, 2015

1 Corinthians 15:1-11 Mark 16:1-8

Ask any preacher which Sunday is the most difficult time to write a sermon and the odds are that you will be told, "Easter Sunday of course."

Why Easter? Surely the death and resurrection of our Lord and Savior, the most important event in our faith is a sufficient message in itself. So what is the problem?

The problem is that there is nothing new for a pastor to say that he or she hasn't said before. On any other Sunday there are stories, news articles, personal happenings and more which can be built into a sermon. There is always something new to say. But not on Easter. It's "same old, same old."

Christ is risen, Christ died, Christ was buried, Christ was raised.

How can anyone say anything more important than that? You can't. I can't. Same old, same old but what a wonderful message it is. We get bored hearing the same thing over and over again. We think, "Not that old story again!" Our mind turns off. Same old, same old.

But not with this story. Christ is risen. Christ died and was buried. Christ was raised. We can't hear it often enough.

The story appears in all four Gospels and surprisingly the Lectionary which most pastors use has John's version of the story as the suggested scripture reading every year, not Matthew's, Luke's or Mark's version, the one that I read this morning. Even the lectionary seems to be same old, same old, using the same gospel passage year after year. All of the four versions tell essentially the same thing but the Lectionary sticks with John. Same old, same old.

This morning I chose the reading from Mark because Mark's Gospel really is the earliest writing of the resurrection story and, in fact, actually ends what Mark wrote. If you followed along in your Pew Bible as I read this scripture, you may have noticed that the Gospel of Mark doesn't end with the reading but, in truth, what Mark wrote does end there. The text which follows was added by someone unknown much later in the history of the church. Why?

It was probably felt that Mark's version was somehow or other incomplete so, somewhere along the line text was added telling of Jesus' appearance to Mary Magdalene, the apostles and others and telling of his ascension. Those tales are certainly very important theologically but to Mark it was apparently sufficient to tell the story of the resurrection and to quit there. After all, the crucifixion and resurrection are fundamental to the story of Christ. Mark was not one to dwell on a subject. His gospel stressed facts and actions only and is the shortest of the four Gospels, but in many ways it is the most detailed. It begins not with the birth of Jesus but with the story of John the Baptizer and Jesus' baptism and ends with the resurrection. That sequence was enough for Mark and was sufficient to tell the story.

What was added to Mark's writing tells of Jesus post-resurrection appearances. A portion of the added text, Mark 16:9-15 says:

⁹ When Jesus rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had driven seven demons. ¹⁰ She went and told those who had been with him and who were mourning and weeping. ¹¹ When they heard that Jesus was alive and that she had seen him, they did not believe it.

¹² Afterward Jesus appeared in a different form to two of them while they were walking in the country. ¹³ These returned and reported it to the rest; but they did not believe them either.

¹⁴ Later Jesus appeared to the Eleven as they were eating; he rebuked them for their lack of faith and their stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen him after he had risen.

¹⁵ He said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation'. ¹⁹ After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God. ²⁰ Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it."

This text tells the apostles to go out and preach the gospel to the world. Our scripture reading from 1 Corinthians is Paul's version of the resurrection story with the story of Jesus' appearances to others after the resurrection, including Christ's appearance to Paul. Hear the story again, this time from Eugene Peterson's Bible paraphrase, The Message :

“¹⁻² Friends, let me go over the Message with you one final time— this Message that I proclaimed and that you made your own; this Message on which you took your stand and by which your life has been saved. (I’m assuming, now, that your belief was the real thing and not a passing fancy, that you’re in this for good and holding fast.)

“³⁻⁹ The first thing I did was place before you what was placed so emphatically before me: that the Messiah died for our sins, exactly as Scripture tells it; that he was buried; that he was raised from death on the third day, again exactly as Scripture says; that he presented himself alive to Peter, then to his closest followers, and later to more than five hundred of his followers all at the same time, most of them still around (although a few have since died); that he then spent time with James and the rest of those he commissioned to represent him; and that he finally presented himself alive to me. It was fitting that I bring up the rear. I don’t deserve to be included in that inner circle, as you well know, having spent all those early years trying my best to stamp God’s church right out of existence.

“¹⁰⁻¹¹ But because God was so gracious, so very generous, here I am. And I’m not about to let his grace go to waste. Haven’t I worked hard trying to do more than any of the others? Even then, my work didn’t amount to all that much. It was God giving me the work to do, God giving me the energy to do it. So whether you heard it from me or from those others, it’s all the same: We spoke God’s truth and you entrusted your lives.”

These world show that Paul, like the other apostles, was given the same charge that they were given, *“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.”*

In a way, Christ’s appearance to Paul was another resurrection. Christ ascended to heaven yet he reappeared later to Paul. Christ was not gone. He was and still is with us and he does appear from time to time because he is still alive. He has appeared to many people again saying *“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation”*. This message has come to pastors and lay people alike. He appears to us, he appears to others, his resurrection is an ongoing process and will remain so until he returns again in glory. Same old, same old. How wonderful it is. **Alleluia! Amen.**

(Note: Scripture citations are from the New International Version of the Bible, 2011)