

THE RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD

“Left Hanging on the Resurrection”

Mark 16:1-8

“Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!” And with that news hangs the whole of the Christian faith.

There’s no scientific way to prove it, no pragmatic evidence to substantiate it, no empirical data to support it. No one actually saw it happen when it happened and there’s no one alive today who saw Christ after he was raised from the dead. There’s nothing but the word of the angel, “Don’t be amazed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here.” There’s nothing but the written witness of faithful hearts who did see him and the verbal witness of millions of others who believe because they did. We have nothing but the word, the promise, nothing but Christ himself.

There’s more to it than that, of course. The Bible tells us that He did it for us. He gave himself for us to set things right with God and to bring all people back to where we all belong – back to the family of God who made us in the beginning to be His very own for all eternity. He gave His life to pay the price of sin and in so doing He destroyed the power of death. He reclaimed the title of His own creation. These are all claims of faith. But how do we know this is true? The resurrection! The resurrection tells us it’s all true. And that’s where we’re left to hang for, in the end, that’s where faith hangs – not on a set of incontrovertible proofs but on the promise and on the word.

Easter is a day of faith – not a day of bunnies and colored eggs and new clothes – because the resurrection of our Lord is an event of faith. The Gospel of the risen and triumphant Christ sustains the faith. Be assured, faith is no simple formula that fits the facts of life, no logic that establishes the rules. For just about the time we think it is, something unpredictable happens and God breaks all the rules again and smashes our air-tight, water-tight, fool-proof grasp of life – something unpredictable like the resurrection!

Even the way Mark presents the news leaves us hanging. He says, “for having heard the news, the women fled the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had come upon them ... and they were afraid.” It seems rather strange that Mark should end his Gospel with loose ends lying all around – strange that he closes on a note of fear – strange that we’re left hanging on the resurrection and nothing more. He includes no record of the witnesses who saw the Lord alive as others do, no story of the doubter called Thomas to support our faith in time of doubt as others do, no great commission to the church to go into all the world and make disciples for Christ as others do.

We’ll never really know why Mark ended his Gospel the way he did but, in some way, it’s significant that he ends it just where we’re at this morning – with this utterly fantastic, unreal news that the Christian faith hangs on – Jesus is alive! But we say to

ourselves, that just can't be. Since the days of Genesis when sin began collecting the wages of death and humanity's existence became a march to the grave, death has seemed to be the end. But if Jesus is risen, something entirely new and astonishing and fearful has happened. Death is no longer the end. No longer do we need to be afraid of it. So what were the women afraid of? What are we afraid of? Life!

And you see that's exactly what the Easter Gospel is all about – not death but life – life that's new and ours in Christ which makes the old life that we have clung to seem insignificant and which confronts us with the need to overhaul our values, our loyalties, our priorities, and which turns our little world completely upside down. The resurrection Gospel makes all that we know and hold to be true seem somehow small and it lays the hand of God on us for a life much bigger than the one we've carved out for ourselves. He is risen – and they were afraid – left hanging on the resurrection.

And that's where we are as well. Perhaps we wish there could be more than that. After all, our Christian faith is built on the resurrection and as Paul once said, "if Christ had not been raised our faith would be in vain." Perhaps we wish someone would come back from the dead today and tell us it's really true. Perhaps we wish we could have proof. But our demand for signs and proofs will not be satisfied. There's simply no computer that can determine the truth of the resurrection, no grave to search for clues, no evidence to satisfy our curiosity. The company of Jesus Christ is not a company of those who have been satisfied by the evidence. It's a company of faith, faith that dares and risks to live on the promise of our Lord and hurls that faith in the face of all the contradictory evidence the world may offer with one bold, "I believe!" He died, he rose again! And He lives. And, in that, His word and promise is sure.

And so we continue to hang on the resurrection. Everything that makes the difference hangs with us. The guilt we carry, our envy, greed, lust, hatred, jealousy, selfishness, the hunger for wholeness, the empty void, the dark despair of grief, the fear of aging, disease, even death itself, the uncertainty about tomorrow, the fear of failure – the resurrection of our Lord says there's more than that – it says that there's forgiveness, that there's salvation, that there's a new life now and for all eternity for those who believe.

Left hanging on the resurrection and life will never be the same again. No proof, no evidence, just the Word and the promise, just Christ. "Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!" Amen.