

Date: July 14, 2024

Texts: Isaiah 42. 1-9 / Mark 16. 1-7

Title: "We Believe: a Risen Lord"

Intro -

cf. - nice to know how stories end...

i.e. - I will admit to starting to watch Penguins games...

gets late, so I record the second half, and go to bed

check the score when I get up in the morning, and then decide

if I want to watch it, or - erase...

relate - a habit that might date back to the winter of 1980

(not that we were recording anything back then...

somewhat in the 'late adopters' group...)

senior year in college... home for some break or another

during the Lake Placid Winter Olympics

had been at a meeting at church (even at that tender young age...)

while the U. S. was playing Russia in the 'Miracle on Ice'

the game was being shown on tape delay, but -

my mother knew the score (reported on the news...)

she greeted us at the door asking if we wanted to know

how it ended (before we watched the game...)

and - based on her general demeanor - she didn't have to tell us...

it was obvious

(and - it was nice to know - because it was

a really nerve-wracking game...)

relate re: last week:

we affirmed our belief that Jesus suffered... crucified... died...

which could be considered "nerve-wracking"

when it comes to a savior, but -

we know the final score...

we know how it ends...

We believe that:

on the third day, he rose again from the dead...

I) The Third Day

relate - in the countdown from Good Friday to Easter Sunday, we travel through
three days

not “72 hours” worth of three full days, but - in the Jewish system of

“day-counting” - where one day ends at sundown,

and a new one begins -

three days pass

cf. - even if only 36 hours or so...

that’s a lot of time to wallow in fears and anxieties...

in doom and gloom...

in “how did things go so horribly wrong...?”

in other words -

it was a period of time when Jesus’ followers -

especially these women who went to the tomb -

experienced what millions upon millions of young people

(and - not so young people...)

experience today:

namely - attached at the hip to their social media vehicle of choice

(twitter / X... FB... Instagram... TikTok... whatever...)

they find the negative hugely out balances anything

that might be seen as positive

(apparently, this even has a name: “doom-scrolling”)

cf. - Doom-scrolling is the act of endlessly scrolling down news apps and

social media, reading all the bad news. And, no surprise -

the recent pandemic has exacerbated these habits in many ways,

“including the fact that there is no shortage of doomsday news.”

fake, or - possibly, even - true...

(but mostly - Russian fakes...)

relate - a lot has been studied and written about this, all of it supporting the idea that this is eroding our mental health

... as it likely was for those who were confronted by the reality of the crucifixion, and - three days to try and process it three days to deal with the gloom and doom that dominated their lives not knowing what the final score would be, so...

focused on what they had at hand: namely: their Messiah had been killed in a humiliating death on a cross. His body had been laid in a cave-like tomb, and a large stone had been rolled against the door.

They were feeling grief over the death of Jesus, stress about the future, and anxiety about where they were right then and there...

- it's all a little tough to process...

unless...

- a young man, all dressed in white, greets you - out of the blue -

when you arrive at the tomb

(or, maybe - that adds to the challenge of processing all this - who knows...?)

but there he is -

breaking into their doom cycle -

offering words that give them reason to hope

(still need to process it, but definitely a change in perspective...)

cf. - we have the possibility of ignoring FB... turning off the twitter feed... muting the TV...

- but processing all that is going on...

escaping the gloom and doom...

is still a challenge

but with these women...

with all those who were witnesses of what happened
on the cross and from the tomb...

with all the countless faithful -

we are invited to affirm that the stone has been rolled away,
to believe that Jesus has been raised...

and - to focus our attentions on the future
where Jesus is leading us...

where Jesus is waiting for us

what do we have to say to that...?

II) Rose from the Dead

cf. - the Gospels all begin with the same reaction to what had just taken place

- alarm... fear... worry...

but they don't leave it there

because...

something extraordinary took place to fundamentally change
the situation...

fundamentally change the lives of all those around -

there was still a lot to process, but -

In the case of the women at the tomb -

whatever they were feeling was soon replaced by

great joy when they realized the truth —

that Jesus, who had truly died,

was truly alive again

- joy... -

less a feeling of the moment

than a long-range optimism that come what may -

in the end - God will make things come out right.

i.e. - a glad... pervasive... confidence -

that changes and affects how we live
not because we hit on “the secret sauce that brings tranquility
to all of life...” (cf.- probably a book out there
by that title...)

but - because Jesus rose again from the dead
and in that reality...
in that affirmation...

the shackles and the limits of the world
in which we live -
fall away...

alas... not everyone got the memo...

cf. - per too many sermons have preached - and at Easter, no less -
making the point that:

it doesn't really matter if Jesus was raised from the dead or not...
they quote an Anglican bishop:

"God isn't interested in conjuring tricks with bones"

and they've gone on to say that Easter is more important than
whether Jesus physically was raised from the dead.

What Easter means instead is that the Spirit of Christ blossoms
wherever we go - in that new life that is symbolized by
the return every year of flowers and green
from the grave of the earth.

(really...?)

cf. - we live in a time that is rapidly dissolving all truths,
including the truth of the Resurrection,

into a matter of personal belief and preference.

and - it is all too easy to reduce the empty tomb to
a symbol of returning life,

bending the stark uniqueness of the event

back into the cycles of nature.

But that choice is not really open to us as Christians...

Paul said it most succinctly in I Cor. 15:

"If Christ has not been raised,
then our proclamation has been in vain, and -
your faith has been in vain"

and the sad truth of the matter is this -

- joy cannot be found in a faith that is in vain...
- hope cannot be grasped in a faith that does not stand upon
the truth that cannot be dissolved...

indeed - why would we want such a faith...?

why would anyone...?

but -

we believe that on the third day, he rose again from the dead

and that makes all the difference.