

and Peter

First Congregational Church Branford
11 AM April 20, 2019; Mark 16:1-8
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When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. They had been saying to one another, ‘Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?’ When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, ‘Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his disciples *and Peter* that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.’ 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.

Christ is Risen!.... [Christ is Risen, Indeed!]

So, *you Easter people*, I often preach a big triumphant message on Easter Sunday.

I’ll talk about the stone rolled away from the tomb; and the young man dressed in a white robe who told the women not to be alarmed. Sometimes I talk about the women coming to the tomb to anoint Jesus, and how in Mark’s account of the story they fled in terror and amazement, *saying nothing to anyone for they were afraid*. Mark’s ending makes you go, what’s up with that? Because eventually, they had to tell, right?!

I could’ve opted to preach on the great resurrection fulfillment of God’s promise to First Congregational Church when you call your next settled pastor, along with lifting up any number of joyful things going on around here - Confirmation Sunday next week!, the church’s **375th** anniversary, our upcoming mission project Branford Builds, our Killams Point Day Camp, or Camp Totokket. Or, I could’ve comforted by affirming that Easter means our death will simply be a *transition*, and that those we have loved and lost, we will see again... I think you would have loved that message.

But, I’m not preaching that today! What happened instead was two words jumped out in today’s gospel passage. Listen for them: “Go, tell his disciples, *and*

Peter, that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see Jesus, just as he told you.”

As Mark tells the story, he doesn't just say, “Go, tell his disciples that he is going ahead of you.” He said, “Go, tell his disciples, *and Peter*.” It's been said that these are two of the most poignant words in scripture.

You may recall that the disciples abandoned Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, but it was only Peter who swore he didn't know him, 3 times he denied him, after which he broke down and wept for his betrayal, for being too afraid to say he knew him.

But, the risen Jesus wants to see Peter. He singles him out. Oh, oh, right?

We have to turn to John's gospel to see what happens when Jesus and Peter meet up after Jesus is resurrected. Mark doesn't tell the story. Well, Jesus doesn't shame Peter, he doesn't bring up *anything* in his past. He doesn't say, how could you, how could you betray me, how could you abandon me? No. He doesn't go there. There are only declarations of love. What's more, get this, Jesus tells Peter to feed his sheep. Jesus used a guilty, broken man to be the rock on which to build his church... Did you hear that? A guilty, broken person... If that doesn't just make you want to weep, I don't know what to say. *Second chances* are what Christianity is all about. Amen? We're a *second chance church*.

So, you know what this means, right? He wants to meet *you*, too. Whatever you've done that you ought not to have done. Whatever you haven't done that you ought to have done. No matter how many times you've betrayed him or others. No matter when you've failed to be a good person, and you can't imagine why anyone should love you, Jesus wants *you* to go to Galilee. *He will see you there*.

Because, beloved, there's something we have to understand about the Good News - God's mercy is *greater* than our failings... You are accepted. Just as you are. You are loved. You are forgiven. Free to begin again with your second chance; or your third, fourth, one-thousand fourth chance. You think it's just two times! It doesn't matter how many times you mess up! Whoever you are.

I know that sometimes we can feel badly about ourselves - people come and talk with me about how they feel. I feel bad about myself sometimes, too. We feel bad over big things we do, or even minute things we do in the course of a day. But, I was thinking about this on *Good Friday*... why do you suppose the great hymn *Just As I Am* became so great? Because God's acceptance of you is greater than who *you* think you *should* be in the world, who *others* think you should be, and how they judge and shame you. But, God's like, I love you just as you are. There's just you - and you are okay. Okay? Say, I'm okay.... Just as I am.... Yes, you've got it.

Whoever they are, *no one* is so far outside of God's reach that they can't be forgiven. And, what I try to pass along is that when you *truly* receive God's

forgiveness - now I'm not talking about just every Sunday coming to church receiving forgiveness - I'm talking about feeling *bad* about something you did, and the great God above saw to it to swoop in and forgive you, *and you got that deep down in your soul forgiveness* - people, when you've got that, when you *know* that God forgives you, guess what? It allows you to forgive your spouse, your ex-spouse, your partner, your pastor, your parishioner, your church, your child, your boss, your co-worker, your neighbor, your mother, your father, your sister, your brother, your aunt, your uncle, your cousin, it even allows you to forgive *yourself!* For not being perfect. Like Peter wasn't perfect. And, Jesus said, come on over here, anyway, Peter. Come over here, _____, Come over here, _____, Come over here.... Let me love you.

A friend and I drifted apart several years ago over what I believed was too many differences between us. I got my feelings hurt over it because I felt abandoned and rejected by her. I prayed, I nursed my grievances a little, then God helped me to forgive her, and I was free. And, I thought it was over - that I had the forgiveness thing down for her. But, last week I recalled during Holy Week a couple of years ago I was in the car, ya know, and I started to replay all the ways I felt rejected by her! My breath grew shallow, and I started to get a little worked up again in my resentment! Then, all of a sudden, the word FORGIVENESS flashed before my eyes. And, it was as simple as that. I laughed, and my breath, heart, and soul were restored. I was free. Risen. I just stopped going over it in my head, *you know the way you do*, how could you do that to me, how could you abandon and reject me? (I know I'm not the only one who does that!) I was done with all that. She was forgiven. And, I was free.

Friends, I've experienced resentment and betrayal enough times in my life to know that when I choose the path of forgiveness, it's as if a stone is rolled away from my entombed soul - *and I walk out free...* I'm not sure *anything* opens us up like forgiveness; forgiveness is *love* that lays down over our anger and resentment. Forgiveness is love that lays down.

Like Jesus taught. Over and over. Not just seven times, but seventy-seven times. One thousand seventy-seven times. You might say, Suzanne, that person hurt me 17 times, and I'll be like, you need to forgive an 18th! Because *look* what Jesus did. I mean, look at what Jesus did. And, he has forgiven *you* that 18th time!

It might be easy for you to forgive some people, but what about that one for you who is Peter? *And, Peter*, too? What about that one from so far back, the one that hasn't budged from that knot in your heart? Can you forgive that one, too? Because that's the one who needs it most of all. That's the one *you* most need to forgive - for you. To be free.

So, here it is - you can *receive* Easter second chances every single day of your life. And, you can *give* Easter second chances every single day of your life - and that's even better. Every single day, forgive the teller, forgive the person who cut you off in traffic, forgive the person who didn't smile at you.

Life is short.... life is short.

Come out of that tomb, forgiven, and forgiving.

Jesus rose from the grave for *that* message today.

Alleluia?

Alleluia.

Amen.