

Spreading the Good News
Mark 16:1-8; John 20:1-18
April 1, 2018 – 10:30 – Easter Sunday

If you were here Good Friday evening, you heard about this unnamed follower of Jesus. For those of you who weren't here and for those of you who were here and can use a bit of review, let me recap. The fourteenth chapter of Mark's Gospel reports that, when Jesus was arrested, all his followers deserted him and fled. But there was this certain young man, in Greek the word is *neoniskos* – it simply means a young male... so there was this certain, unnamed young man wearing nothing but a linen cloth who followed Jesus when everyone else fled. He almost got caught. The authorities grabbed hold of his garment; but he slipped out and ran away naked.

Today, Easter Sunday, I bring you the rest of the story. You see that young man, the *neoniskos*, appears only one other place in the entire bible – in today's Easter Story. On the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Salome went to the tomb. When they got there, they found that the stone had already been rolled away. They entered the tomb, and they saw a young man, a *neoniskos*, dressed in a white robe. 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. Go and tell his followers."

And so, I ask the same question I asked on Good Friday, who was this young man. Matthew says there was an angel at the tomb. Luke says there were two men in dazzling apparel; and John says there were two angels in white. But Mark simply states that there was a young man dressed in a white robe.

On Friday, I told you that I believe this young man is a place holder, a place holder for every Christian, male or female, young or old, that has chosen to follow Jesus over the last two thousand years – chosen to follow Jesus when others have fled. And today I tell you, this same young man is a place holder, a place holder for you and for me and for every Christian of the last two thousand years that would announce the Good News of the resurrection.

Mark's Gospel ends in an very interesting way. We're told that the women "fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid." Now, yes there are endings after that, but most scholars agree that anything following Mark 16:8 is a later addition.

John's Gospel account which is the prescribed reading for this and every Easter, has Mary alone at the tomb. In that account she has a personal encounter with the risen Christ; and, following Jesus' instruction, she goes and tells the disciples, "I have seen the Lord," and she tells them all that he said to her.

Which account is historically accurate, we don't know. Mark was written earlier; Mark is a simpler account; Mark would tend to be more historic. Which account is theologically true? I tell you, "Both of them." They each have their own true story to tell about the risen Christ. I reflected a bit at 8:30 about Jesus telling Mary not to cling to him. (You can read about that on our website later today.) But Mark says the women didn't tell anyone. They must have said something to somebody, because we know the Good News some twenty centuries later; or did they? Maybe there were other visitors to the tomb. Maybe our *neoniskos* friend spread the Good News to other folks.

No, I don't know who told whom, or what really happened at that tomb two thousand years ago. But I do know, we are called to be the *neoniskos*; we are called to be the followers of Christ; we are called to spread the Good News. Friends the news of the resurrection is the greatest news the world has ever known.

Today, Easter is the greatest holiday of the Christian calendar. We tend to make a bigger deal of Christmas, and I fear that most of the "bigger deal" is for secular rather than sacred reasons. Oh, I don't want to diminish God's coming into the world, God's taking on of human form; but the ultimate goal of God's coming, of taking on human form was the passion, death, and most of all the resurrection from the dead.

Indeed, the entire Christian faith can be summed up in two statements: God desires to be in loving relationship with each of us; and, we are called out of that relationship to be in loving relationship with each other. God took on human form in the person of Jesus to further that relationship. Jesus suffered death on a cross, to wipe away the sins that might stand in the way of that relationship; and finally, on that first Easter Sunday, Jesus rose from the dead. Jesus conquered even death, and Jesus promised to be with us always; and always means always – in life, in death, and in life beyond death. That's the news of the resurrection – the greatest news that world has ever know; and it's the greatest news the world has ever known because it furthers the greatest gift the world has ever known, the gift of God's amazing love.

And, if we are called to be the *neoniskos*, we are called to spread the Good News; and just how do we do that? Each of us has our own gifts. Some are called to preach. Some are called to teach. Some are called to serve. Some are called to the mission field. Some are called to further worship through music or reading. Some are called to provide food or care for those less fortunate than ourselves. Some are called to provide fellowship. But there's one thing I believe for certain; and that's all are called. You and I and every person who calls themselves Christian, is called to serve in the name of the risen Christ.

John Wesley said, “Do all the good you can, for everyone you can, in every way you can, at every time you can.” I like to speak of sharing the love of Christ in thought and word and deed.

First we share the love of Christ in our thoughts. We seek to keep our thoughts “pure.” That means avoiding evil, avoiding anything that would “pollute” our minds. Seek ye first the kingdom of God and God’s righteousness.

Then we share the love of Christ with our words. Yes, I think it’s okay to talk about our faith with others. I encourage people to talk about their faith. But sometimes sharing the love simply means offering a friendly greeting – a hello and a smile to a stranger, or a friendly, “Have a good day.” Such greetings can make a big difference in the life of someone who is struggling.

Still, most importantly, we share the love of Christ with our actions – our priorities, our behaviors, and service to our neighbors – our neighbors next door and our neighbors half way around the world. That’s the Good News we are called to share.

I’ve chosen this Easter to concentrate on Mark’s Gospel account, despite the richness of John. Do you know how Mark’s Gospel starts? Chapter 1, verse 1: “The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” Now some people will read that and say, “Of course chapter 1, verse 1 is the beginning; and chapter 16 verse 8 is the end.” And I say, “No. . . No. . .” No, the entire Gospel, the entire book is the beginning of the Good News; and that Good News is still being written. It’s being written by every *neoniskos* for the last two thousands years, every person who would follow Jesus when others have fled; and it’s being written by every person who would announce the Good News of the risen Christ; and it’s being written by you and it’s being written by me every time we reach out to share the love of Christ. And I tell you, though the resurrection of Jesus Christ, that Good News will never end.

Praise be to God for the Good News of the resurrection. Praise be to God for Christ’s presence in our lives this day and forever more.

Let us pray. . .

Most holy and risen Lord,
lead us and guide us

that we may share the good news of your amazing love,
in our thoughts, in our words, and in our actions.

This we pray in your holy name.

Amen.

Rev. Mark L. Steiger, Pastor
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