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April 4, 2021

Zion Lutheran Church, Lewistown, MT  
Easter Sunday Mark 16:1-8

Christ is risen! **He is risen indeed!** Alleluia! **Alleluia!**

Eight years ago, I was living in Wrangell, Alaska in the first year of my pastor internship, when I received a call from my brother that my dad was not eating and that I had better come. By the time I got there he hadn't spoken to anyone for a day or two. I had arrived just in time.

My mom and I spent the day at his bedside. She had been there the day before, too, and needed a break, so for an hour or so I was alone with Dad. The nurses had been giving him some juice, and he had had some success in drinking from a straw, so I thought I'd give it a try.

As I got up from my chair and moved to the table, I said, "Daddy, do you want to try some juice?" And he looked at me and said, "Juice would be nice." We both looked at each other, with our eyebrows up, and our eyes wide. THAT was unexpected! Those were the last words he spoke before he died later that night.

In the weeks and months that followed, I would occasionally have a dream where my dad showed up. He never spoke, he was just there. And like most dreams, the place and the situation didn't make much sense. But I was always startled by Dad's presence in my dream. He had died and he wasn't supposed to be there. And I think in some of the dreams I even told him that.

Then I would wake up and feel so badly that I had had those feelings. Why hadn't I welcomed him into the imaginings of my dreams? Why had I been so unnerved by his presence? I wish I could go back and greet him warmly and talk with him again.

In Mark's version of Jesus' resurrection, the women who come to the tomb to care for Jesus' body are surprised by what they find. The stone is rolled away, the tomb is empty, and someone dressed in white gives them startling news that Jesus has been raised from the dead. Most of that is like the other gospel versions we usually hear on Easter Sunday.

What's different in this version is that Jesus is not there at all. They are only told that he has been raised, and that they will see him in Galilee. And as wonderful as this news should have been for them, they run away from the tomb in terror and amazement, afraid to tell anyone what they had seen and heard.

This isn't how death works. As much as the women might have told you, "If only we had one more day, one more moment, one more time to sit at Jesus feet and listen to him," the shock of the dead not staying dead was more than they could handle.

Mark places us in an in-between place this Easter. The promise that the women and the disciples would see Jesus again was confronted with fear of the unexpected.

The disappointment from the Friday before when the One they thought was going to save them by physical and political power had been put to death, was held in tension with the hope that his promise to rise again just might be true.

The proclamation of the young man dressed in white that Jesus had risen was met with the silence that accompanies confusion and amazement and fear.

Is this the Easter story you expected to hear today? We only hear from Mark's gospel every three years, and that's when we decide not to read the one from John's gospel when Jesus actually shows up and speaks to Mary Magdalene.

Mark shows us a Jesus whose identity as Savior is hard to recognize, especially by those closest to him. The demons recognize him as the Son of David. The crowds flock to be fed and healed by him. But the disciples don't always understand who he is, at least not in the same ways others do.

Each of us comes to this Sunday, this worship service, with our own perceptions about Jesus. We each came here with our own expectations. Some are ready to encounter the risen Christ. Some have very low expectations about meeting Christ here.

Perhaps today you'll be surprised! But it's also possible that this is not the place where Christ will come to meet you. Notice that Jesus did not first appear in the temple or a synagogue. According to the angel, Jesus was going to meet the disciples back home in Galilee, where they once led very ordinary lives.

Notice that Jesus includes Peter who will receive this good news along with the other disciples. He probably thought the others would kick him out after he denied knowing Jesus, and maybe they would have. But Jesus wants him to be there when he meets up with all of them again. //

My dad hasn't come into my dreams in quite a while. He comes into my mind and heart now through photographs, or a song, or a story my family tells when we get together.

Sometimes that's how we encounter Jesus, too. In a piece of art, in the words of a song, or in the stories we read in the Bible. I hope you will get a glimpse of Jesus here today. Maybe you will hear his voice in the words of the songs we sing, or taste the sweetness of his love in the bread and wine of his meal for you.

Jesus also comes to find us in other ways. He meets us in the community of believers. Jesus has extended grace to me through someone I have offended and that person forgave me and welcomed me back into relationship with them. Jesus shows up in the care we give to one another in times of grief or struggle—maybe with the gift a casserole or a note of encouragement.

The acts of love and mercy we receive from others come from the source of love and mercy, our Almighty God who gave that love to us in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

Or maybe today, you will leave this place wondering if what you heard is true. Maybe you wonder if Jesus really is alive, and is going ahead of you to meet you in a place that you would never expect him to find you. Because that's what Jesus does, he comes to us. As much as we think we can control when and how we find and interact with Jesus, the truth is, he finds us.

That might be startling news. And maybe we'll react in ways we wish we hadn't. But Jesus doesn't give up on us. He makes himself known to some in private, to others in public settings, and often when we least expect it.

May the unpredictable nature of the risen Christ take you by surprise.  
Thanks be to God! Amen

## **Prayers of Intercession**

Alive in the risen Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, we bring our prayers before God who promises to hear us and answer in steadfast love.

*A brief silence.*

Praise to you for your power revealed in the resurrection! Fill your church with the power of your love that is stronger than death. Send us to tell the good news wherever death holds sway. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

Praise to you for your life at work in the resurrection! Fill all of creation with your life. Bring it to blossom and flourish; use it to remind us of your persistent grace. Cultivate our care for what you have made. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

Praise to you for the peace made possible in the resurrection! Fill the nations with your peace. Draw together people of all nations and languages; reveal new possibilities and inspire new beginnings. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

Praise to you for the hope of the resurrection! Fill all in need with hope: those who are afraid or confused, those who are sick or suffering, those who are dying, and those who grieve. We pray especially for those listed in our bulleting and those we name now in our hearts. Assure us all of your promises. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

Praise to you for the joy of your resurrection! Fill this assembly with joy as we are called your beloved in baptism. Multiply that joy so that we share it at home, at work, and in our community. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

Praise to you for your faithfulness revealed in the resurrection! Fill us with trust, that we join with all who have gone before us in proclaiming: “your mercy endures forever!” Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

In the hope of new life in Christ, we raise our prayers to you, trusting in your never-ending goodness and mercy; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**