

Green Hill Presbyterian Church
“Go and Tell”
Thomas G. Speers, III
Easter—April 1, 2018

Lesson: Mark 16:1-8

Very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, the women—Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome—went to the tomb. They had the work to do, the proper customs—anoointing the body and in caring for him, they found comfort for themselves. The others were still hiding or asleep, but these women had stayed and watched the horror of Friday and waited all through Saturday and now at first light they were on their way to do for him as was the custom. But it was not as they expected. The stone was rolled away and a young man all in white was sitting there inside the tomb and of course they were alarmed. Who could blame them?

What follows are the very first words of Easter: Do not be alarmed. Don't be afraid. This is the command that is proclaimed over and over again, as often as any command from God. You might think that the command that shows up most often in Scripture might be “Love God” or “Love your neighbor” or something like that. It isn't. The commandment that appears most often is don't be afraid. Don't be alarmed. Here at the tomb, as at the beginning when he was born, the angel says the same thing: Don't be afraid or alarmed. Those are words to begin our Easter too. Don't be alarmed.

Of course we are. We are alarmed by the state of our world. We are afraid of crime and violence, of failure, financial ruin or just not having enough; we are afraid of getting sick or suffering or dying; we are alarmed by our inability to face the real needs of the world and we are afraid that we may be asked to do more than we are able. If I asked us all to write down all our fears, we might be here all day. We know about fear. So the first words of Easter spoken by the angel to the women are also spoken to us. Don't be alarmed. Don't be afraid. Remember the words of the song: *Be not afraid, I go before you always. Come follow me and I will give you rest.*¹

So the very first command of Easter is do not be alarmed or afraid. The next commands are to go and to tell. Go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee. Go and tell them the story. You will see him in Galilee, 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.

The End. That is the way Mark's gospel ends. They fled from the tomb and said nothing to anyone for they were afraid. Of course it isn't really the end or we wouldn't be here today. Somewhere along the way they found their voices again and began to tell the story, a story that has been passed along across the generations to the likes of us. Jesus is not to be found in the tomb. The tomb is empty. He is going ahead of you to Galilee. You will see him there. Just as he told you. Go and tell the disciples.

In a world that is broken and hurting, we have a message to proclaim. John Buchanan has written about a friend who announced that “he had lost hope for the human race. The news each day was so consistently and relentlessly depressing, he said, that he was certain that the human project had run its course.” The women who fled the tomb and said

¹ Be Not Afraid, Text and music © 1975, 1978, Robert J. Dufford, SJ and OCP.

nothing to anyone would recognize Buchanan's friend. But that is not the whole story and it is precisely into our seemingly hopeless world that resurrection continues. "We believe," Buchanan writes, "that although bullies, thugs, and murderers seem to be winning, peace and justice will prevail at the end of the day. We dare to believe that the long arc of history, as Martin Luther King Jr. reminded us, is toward freedom, equality, kindness, justice, and love."² That's our story. Go and tell the disciples.

Go and tell the story. One of my heroes in the faith was a woman named Polly. She was clerk of session in my first church and died much too young with cancer. As she was dying she talked with me about her funeral service and knowing that it would be difficult for the congregation when she died, she told me that I should end her service with words that I'll use at the end of our service today—words written in the sixteenth century: *The strife is o'er, the battle done, the victory of life is won; the song of triumph has begun. Alleluia!* Go and tell the story.

Some of us have a hard time telling the story in words that are authentic for us. That's OK. Maybe we are like the women that way, before they found their voices: afraid and saying nothing to anyone. Yet today we all have a voice, even a little one. Your voice may be the voice someone needs to hear. Your voice may be the only one someone is able to hear. Go and tell the story: He is going ahead of you to Galilee. You will see him there, just as he told you.

Galilee is back home. That's where you'll see him. Galilee is the place where you've known great joys and unbearable sorrows. It is the place of everyday living with all its struggles and sacrifices, its agony and ecstasy and all its fears. Galilee is the place where we live. There you will meet the risen Christ.

Though he might not think of it as an Easter story, I am indebted to Robert Fulghum, the "All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten" man, for this Easter story. He speaks of watching his neighbor come out her front door on her way to work. All is well until suddenly she walks into a spider web and you know her reaction. She screams and flings her baggage in all directions. "At the same time she does a high-kick, jitterbug sort of dance—like a mating stork in crazed heat." Desperately she tries to get the spider and its web off her hair, face, clothes. Watching this reminds Fulghum of song he knows. "And you know, too. And your parents and your children, they know. About the eensy-weensy spider. Went up the waterspout. Down came the rain and washed the spider out. Out came the sun and dried up all the rain. And the eensy-weensy spider went up the spout again. You probably know the motions, too.

"What's the deal here? Why do we all know that song? Why do we keep passing it on to our kids? Especially when it puts spiders in such a favorable light? ...Maybe because it puts the life adventure in such clear and simple terms. The small creature is alive and looks for adventure. Here's the drainpipe—a long tunnel going up toward some light. The spider doesn't even think about it—just goes. Disaster befalls it—rain, flood, powerful forces. And the spider is knocked down and out beyond where it started. Does the spider say, "To hell with that"? No. Sun comes out—clears things up—dries off the spider. And the small creature goes over to the drainpipe and looks up and thinks it really wants to know what is up there. It's a little wiser now—checks the sky first, looks for better toeholds, says a spider prayer, and heads up through mystery toward the light and wherever.

² Buchanan, John M. "Reason for Hope" © The Christian Century, March 25, 2015

“Living things have been doing just that for a long, long time. Through every kind of disaster and setback and catastrophe. We are survivors. And we teach our kids about that. And maybe spiders tell their kids about it, too, in their spider sort of way.”³

Don’t be afraid. Go to Galilee. The sun’s coming out to dry us up and to send us back up the drainpipe to live life in all its fullness. That’s where we’ll meet him. Don’t be afraid. Go and tell the story: Christ is risen. Christ is risen, indeed. Alleluia.

³ Robert Fulghum, *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*. Random House Publishing Group © 1986, 1988, 2003.