EASTER SUNDAY

Nu’uanu Congregational Church

Jeannie D. Thompson

April 4, 2021

*“On The Road Again”*

*Christ Is Risen,* and the response is***He is Risen Indeed****!*

In point of fact, Christ is risen and…well he is *gone! He is risen and gone!* To coin a phrase:  *Christ has left the building!*

In all four gospels, Christ is not where everyone—including his disciples—thought he would be. He is certainly not where they left him. He was in the tomb and a large stone had been rolled into the opening. No one could have gotten in…or out. Each gospel tells this story. Of course, each tells it a little differently, but all come to the same conclusion:

Christ. Is. Risen. And…*GONE.*

The Gospel of John has a brief moment where Jesus meets Mary right outside of the tomb. She has been peering into the empty tomb and talking to a couple of angels who are sitting there on the place where his lifeless body had been laid, but Jesus is *not* in there with them. Even in John, Jesus is already *outside* of the tomb. He is back in the world…*and he is ready to move on*. Indeed, he is already on the move!

In John, so ready and eager to get going is the Risen Christ that he will not let Mary touch him. He has not yet ascended to God, so he will not risk being held back or hindered—he is still working, still ministering to us. He is—to coin another phrase—*on the road, again.*

The resurrection story that was read for us this morning, of course, is from the Gospel of Mark and Mark records details that emphasize the same shocking truth—that Jesus is *not* in the tomb. And Mark is also careful to give us details that emphasize the uniqueness and the reliability of his story.

And so first, Mark tells us that it was very early in the morning, but he says, the sun had already risen when the women brought funeral spices to properly anoint Jesus’ body for death. Mark includes this detail so that we will know that there was enough light for them to see and report things accurately. He will not allow naysayers say it was too dark for the women to have seen what they said they saw.

Mark also mentions how the women had been talking amongst themselves as they made there way to the tomb. They had been wondering how they were going to get in.

The women were there to offer one more act of caring, love, and respect for their teacher and friend: they were going to properly prepare his dead body with the funeral spices they carried.

In including them in his story, Mark is vindicating them from any and all accusations that they had gone there to remove the body and then tell some wild tale about resurrection. No! They went because they, too, believed he was dead.

Indeed, their whole focus, as they approached the tomb, was about how they were going to get in. *‘Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?’* they asked each other. [v.3]At this point, Mark is careful to report that the stone was “very large.” [v.4]

The women were so shocked as anyone else to find it empty. Not only is the tomb empty, there is an angel in Jesus’ place who tells them that Jesus is already gone. He is gone ahead of them to Galilee.

Jesus is on the road again.

One of the things you should know about the Gospel of Mark is that most Bible scholars believe that this is where Mark’s gospel ends. It ends with the women being frightened by what they have experienced. It ends with them fleeing the empty tomb in terror. It ends with them being so afraid that they do not tell anyone what they have seen and heard—not even the message the angel gave them.

What do you make of that?

Here is my thinking: if this is where the gospel story ends, then how did the message get out? For me, the most important detail here is that it did! The story of Jesus’ life, his ministry, his death, and his resurrection just did *not* stay a secret. Here we are more than two thousand years later, and guess what? *The word got out!*

There is a line in one of the songs from the rock opera, *Jesus Christ, Superstar*, that I have always remembered. It’s the title song and it is sung by, of all people, Judas, towards the end of the opera. Confused and frustrated, he sings: *“If you'd come today you would have reached a whole nation. Israel in 4 BC had no mass communication.”*

No, it didn’t. Yet, here we are! Christ’s story did *not* stop there. The good news of the love of God did *not* get lost in the rush and shuffle of time.

Despite the fear that struck at the very heart of those who loved him, Jesus’ message of love, grace, and resurrection got out. Not only did it get out but it has gone *everywhere*—to the very ends of the earth, and back again!

And I cannot help but believe it is because of this thing that all of the Gospels agree on—which is that on Easter morning, three days after being in the tomb, Jesus was not there anymore. The tomb was empty. The risen Christ was out in the world. God’s deep love was so great that even the grave did not prevent it from going forward into the world.

Now you and I—the human factor in this story—*we* can be terrified and intimidated into silence. *We* can find ourselves at the end of our ability to understand and cope with even a bold new truth about the power of God’s love.

Our good news, though, is that this power is stronger than our confusion, stronger than our fear.

*We* can find ourselves intimidated by the implications of love and the claims it places on us—the claim to proclaim this truth far and wide, and in as many ways as possible.

However, the love of God will always empty out the tomb and go on ahead of us; the love of God will lead us out of places of shadow and death, and into the light of a new morning, and a new call to proclaim God’s love.

The love and mercy of God will always be ours to proclaim, and we can do that by caring for the sick through acts of generosity like taking a meal over to a friend who is not well. But we also care for the sick when we raise our voice, or cast our vote to make health care more available to all people.

We proclaim it when we are not hesitant, frightened, or repulsed by the homeless people we see, but instead we pray for their well-being.

We can also proclaim it when we volunteer, or give to shelters and outreach programs—like River of Life, and the Institute for Human Services in Iwilei—and also, when we pay attention to the work of organizations like *The Appleseed Foundation*, *The American Friends Service Committee,* and many other such groups who carefully monitor the arrangements that are being voted on at the local and federal level for the relief of people who are homeless and other at-risk populations. We can do that!

We can be afraid and intimidated like the women. Or we can take courage in knowing that for two thousand years, God has continued to conquer our fear and intimidation—no matter how powerful and death dealing. God has been able to conquer our intimidation and go forth into the world.

Friends, it is Easter morning and the tomb is behind us now. New life has come into the world—Jesus Christ Is Risen from the tomb and is already out in the world, already on the road again. Let us praise God, Alleluia!

Let us proclaim this good news by following him into places of need, and among the people he loves. Let us be on the road again with Christ.

Let it be so. Amen.