



## EASTER SUNDAY April 8, 2007

Rev. Ronni Verboom

Mark 16:1-8

### “Don’t Be Alarmed”

“Don’t be alarmed,” said the young man dressed in a white robe in the empty tomb.

Let’s say you walk into school or work one morning, or you come to worship at church, and someone you’ve never met comes over to you, puts a hand on your arm, and quietly says, “Don’t be afraid,” then pauses. What’s our normal response? FEAR! This talk about fear suggests to us that there might **INDEED BE** something to fear. Now let’s say this stranger is not only someone you don’t know, but is also dressed very oddly, shines with an unfamiliar kind of light, and is standing in the chapel of the funeral home where you and your family have just arrived to spend time with the body of a loved one immediately prior to the visitation time. You peek around the stranger to see that the casket of your loved one is empty. I don’t know about you, but I’d probably feel afraid.

When we come to worship on Easter morning, however, we aren’t afraid, are we? Because we understand some things, that the women didn’t understand in the early hours of dawn that long-ago morning. We know the strange young man is a messenger from God, some kind of angel, and we know that Jesus’ body has not been stolen, but raised from death. We know that Jesus will greet his friends in person, and give them love and reassurance. So, we don’t need to be afraid. Do we?

Well----- The Resurrection of Jesus Christ, his victory over sin and death is surely GOOD NEWS!!!! BUT----- Do you trust it? Do you REALLY believe it? Because if you do, and you are SERIOUS about his message, it will change your life. You will be out of step with the world. You will have to wander through this world and this life that is filled with dangers, anger, selfishness, greed and hatred dispensing grace. You will be an agent of grace, because that's what Jesus' recruits do. You will be one who champions the cause of the least and the lost, you will go places you never intended to go and do things you aren't comfortable doing. You will love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. Have you been praying a lot for Osama Bin Laden recently? Some weeks ago I preached a sermon on praying for enemies and wanting God's best for them. At the ten-thirty worship service, as I read the prayer request cards, I came to one that simply listed that name: Osama Bin Laden. I was moved and humbled—so honored to have a member of our church ready to do that. So I did. I prayed for him. I don't often step forward in that way publicly. Sometimes, like the women, I, too, am afraid.

Christ is Risen! Do you believe it? Then be ready for your life to change.

(Choral Anthem)

Matthew 28:1-10

“[The women] left the tomb quickly, with fear and great joy...”

Life creates such powerful feelings in us. So does our faith walk. It WILL lead us into times of fear. But there will also ALWAYS be a deep and profound joy underlying the fear.

CHRIST HAS CONQUERED SIN AND DEATH. The world is still full of both. But Easter gives us the end of the story. God's ways will triumph. They will. They will. His ways of love and mercy and justice will win in the end. They will. They will. They will. Do you really believe this? If and when you do, you will find the amazing joy and peace that pass all understanding, and these will carry you through whatever trials and sorrows this world brings to you.

We've heard the story of the Easter events so many times. But these things really HAPPENED. They really did. The story seems to us like a fairy tale sometimes. The people lived far away and wore such different clothes and spoke other languages—it seems like a “once upon a time” world we read about in the Bible. I realized how much that is true when I visited Israel for the first time. As we drove from the airport along an expressway, I saw the signs that pointed out the exit to Nazareth. It was weird. My conscious mind always KNEW of COURSE there's a

Nazareth. But somehow my deep inside being needed to experience its reality in that tangible way.

I invite you to trust in the reality of the Easter story. Let it bring you the promise of victory over sin and death. Not just for Jesus. Not just for his long-ago followers. But for YOU and YOUR own loved ones.

Many years ago, my husband and I were close to another couple in our church. After some years of friendship, the woman told us she had been married once before, in her late teens. Her young husband had died, after briefly battling a fatal illness. She told us how that experience had confirmed her faith, rather than challenging it. She was with her young husband at the moment of death. She said, "He opened his eyes, and looked directly at someone I couldn't see standing in front of him. He said, 'Hi, Grandpa, I'm coming home,' then closed his eyes and left us. Ever since that day, I've not been afraid of death. I just wonder who will be there to greet me."

Christ has conquered sin and death. For you and yours. It's true! Be joyful.

(HYMN 311 "Now the Green Blade Riseth" )

Luke 24:1-12

"...two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them...the men said..., '...He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee... "The Son of Man must be...crucified and on the third day rise again."' Then they remembered his words."

Why do we get together on Easter to go over this story again? So that people who never heard it can hear its good news? Of course. But if that were the only reason, the rest of us could just take a break over Easter week-end, and let the people who have never come to church attend. Why don't we do it that way?

Because we need to remember the good news. We need to hear it over and over again. Actually the noise of life often drowns it out. The sound of the good news can seem so faint we aren't even sure it's true anymore. We need to remember, to hear it proclaimed over and over.

You know, life is like that, isn't it? If we stop to think back over the years behind us, looking for God's grace and presence, I think we will find him. But we may have to stop and reflect. I believe that there are times God reveals himself to us, but we aren't aware of it in the moment. Perhaps we weren't ready to see him then,

or he brought a message to us we weren't yet able to understand. We will understand it later, after God's had time to shape us, after we've grown and matured in some ways. Christ is with us in this very moment. Christ has been with us all along. Remember that. Remember to look for him. You WILL find him, if you let your HEART lead you. Cling to what he tells you: "I love you. I am with you. I will never leave you. All will be well. No matter how difficult things seem in this moment. All will be well." Don't let the Easter message slip away. Remember it today, and let God remind you of it tomorrow. Remember. It's true.

(APOSTLES CREED – with "hell")

There is no place God cannot find you; there is no place you can move beyond his love and forgiveness . Christ holds the keys to hell and death. He frees us from them both. AMEN!!!!!!