

Easter B 2015

You probably don't know this about me: I'm an organized type.  
I like to plan things out.  
I'm not a spontaneous, fly-by-the-seat-of-my-pants kind of guy.  
I like things organized. Efficient. Co-ordinated.  
Imagine that: a Lutheran pastor who likes things "in good order."

Truth be told, some of you are just like me.  
You like things planned out.  
You like to have things arranged. Outlined. Plotted out.  
You like things organized.

Do you notice how often your plans get blown out of the water?  
Life does not unfold as you have planned.  
Events, big and small, occur in your life that require you to adapt and change.  
In the last week, I have heard the following from you:  
The cancer is back.  
My mother has died.  
The blood clot is life-threatening.  
The dementia is worse.  
My teenager was arrested.  
I'm being laid off at work.  
I don't know what to do.  
Ah...the best laid plans of mice and men.

The women in our Easter story had plans changed on them.  
Their plan was to follow the Master.  
They had been doing so for three years.  
He made all the difference for them.  
He had the power of God in him.  
He spoke with wisdom that could only come from God.  
He was the Messiah.  
Their hearts were invested in him.  
But this week, they watched him executed by the Roman soldiers, egged on by  
the religious leaders.  
They saw his dead body placed in a tomb.

When you look at the women who first receive the Easter news, you see, first of all, grief.

They are there to anoint Jesus' body with spices.

They are there to mark the death of their friend...their teacher...their master... their Lord... and to help them mourn.

Grief brings them to the tomb that first Easter morning.

But God has a different plan.

Even in their grief, the women made new plans.

We have duties to perform.

We have to anoint the body.

We have to give him a proper burial.

That's what we'll do.

Not so fast, ladies.

Two problems quickly get in the way.

First, it was approaching sunset on Friday when Jesus' body was placed in a tomb.

It was Sabbath time, from sunset Friday to sunset Saturday.

No work on the Sabbath; remember?

They had to wait until they could buy spices.

First thing Sunday morning, they buy the spices.

Then they can make their way to the cemetery.

Second problem.

Mark tells us the question they asked each other as they made their way:

"Who will roll away the stone for us?"

The large stone blocking the entrance to the tomb is too much for them.

The stone prevents access to the one they have come to anoint.

They can't move it. Who will?

They are worried as they make their way to the cemetery.

Their plan may not work.

But God has a different plan.

I love these Easter women. They are just like you and me.

They are grieving, just like you and me.

They have the rug pulled out from underneath them, just like you and me.

Their plans fail, just like you and me.

They pick themselves up and try again, just like you and me.

What else do we see in these ladies? Mark tells us: they are alarmed.  
To be alarmed means you are surprised...You are caught off guard...  
You were not expecting something.  
And I'm not talking about the paint color of your living room.  
I'm talking about the big questions...life and death...the most important stuff.

Mary, Mary, and Salome were alarmed on Easter morning.  
The stone is already rolled away. The tomb is already open.  
Instead of a dead body they were expecting, they find a young man in white.  
He is obviously an angelic messenger. Alarmed.  
He delivers the good news of Easter morning...  
"He is not here. He has been raised."

The angelic messenger is almost...like an administrative assistant explaining why you can't have a quick word with the boss:  
"You're looking for Jesus? Sorry, you just missed him."  
You've missed him because he has moved on ahead to other pressing business.  
The accent, in Mark's account of Easter, seems to be on Jesus not being present...  
because he has better things to do than wait around in a tomb.  
The resurrected Lord has no intention of giving us time to sit around...  
pondering whether we believe in this sort of thing or not.  
Instead, the instruction to the women is to tell the disciples, and especially Peter who had denied him, that they had better get on the move (Mark 16:7).  
Jesus had explained already that after he was raised up, he would go ahead of them to Galilee (Mark 14:28).  
Now the "young man" reminds them of this scheduled rendezvous.  
If it's Jesus they want, they will need to head back to Galilee.

And off the women go with this Easter story.  
I love how Mark ends the Easter reading..."and they were afraid."  
"Terror and amazement had seized them." Love that.  
They hardly knew what to do with this story.  
The future is open ended. It does not end in the tomb.  
You can't keep God at bay with a large stone.  
God continues to do incredible things.  
You can't stop the life movement that God has given us.  
God is too amazing and powerful. And they were afraid. Rightly so.

I look at the women of Easter morn and I see: Grief. Worry. Alarm. Fear.  
Have you had any of those experiences?

Of course you have. You've had all of them.

They are common emotional reactions to the ordinary difficulties of life.

They are normal to us all...everyone here.

We have grief...we have worry...we have alarm...we have fear.

When the angel announces that our Lord Jesus has been raised...

the announcement is spoken right smack dab to our everyday lives.

The Easter announcement is spoken to you and me.

Looking for Jesus? Sorry. He is not dead. He is risen. Go to Galilee.

That is God's plan.

As St. Paul told the Ephesians, "God has a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth."

Galilee? Why should we go to Galilee?

The women were from Galilee.

The angel told them to go where they are from.

You, too. You follow. Go to where you from.

That's where you will find Jesus...that's where God is at work.

Not some foreign place...not some big city...not some holy shrine.

Right where you live...that's where you will find the risen Lord.

That's the promise of Easter.

Galilee, huh?

Where Jesus did all of his teaching, healing, feeding?

Where his fame spread...where people followed.

Go there? Yea...go there.

Where you heard the call to follow.

Where you encountered the Lord that transformed your life, renewed your heart, and filled you with hope.

Where you heard God's way of living...that makes life rich and meaningful.

Where you traveled together with a community of followers...for mutual support and consolation and service.

Where you heard the promise of new life...and tasted it.

Yea, go back to Galilee...where it all began.

When you recover from the shock of the empty tomb, go back to the site of his ministry, where God has promised you will find your Lord.