

The Rev. Robert H. Malm  
April 21, 2019  
Easter Day

**“...without end...now and forever...”**

The Gospel accounts of the Resurrection just stop. There isn't any real end or any kind of conclusion. Mark's ending is the most amazing. The women discover the empty tomb; they encounter an angel who tells them Jesus has risen. They flee from the tomb, astonished. Mark stops the story by writing, "...they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid..."

Matthew does tell us that the risen Jesus met these women. He told them not to be afraid. He said, "Go tell my brothers to go to Galilee and they will see me there." At some point over the next weeks, the disciples get to Galilee. They see Jesus. He tells them to go to all the world and make disciples. Matthew stops the story after Jesus says, "I am with you always, to the close of the age." Matthew also reports that "some doubted;" doubted the Resurrection; doubted that this really was Jesus, risen from the dead.

Luke and John give us more information about the Risen Christ. He appears to Mary Magdalene early on Easter Day, and later in the morning he appears to Peter. Peter ran to the empty tomb after hearing the report of the women, even though the other disciples didn't believe them.

In the afternoon Jesus appears to two believers on their way to Emmaus. They only recognize Jesus after he breaks bread, shares the first Eucharist with them. The first Easter Day ends with Jesus appearing to ten disciples in the evening.

John tells us about an appearance one week later in Jerusalem, in the same upper room as before, but this time Thomas is present. John also mentions Jesus in Galilee. Only Luke includes Jesus' Ascension on the 40<sup>th</sup> day after he rose from the dead. For Luke, the Ascension is the link between the Resurrection and the power of the Holy Spirit coming upon the disciples and many others on Pentecost. In every account, Jesus lives on. As he said in Matthew's narrative, "I am with you always."

We are used to endings. We know the finality of physical death. Easter proclaims the reality of new life, spiritual life, eternal life. The Gospels stop, but the reality of God's love continues. The Risen Lord gives new life, new love.

The journey of Easter begins the day Jesus rose from the dead. There is no end. The journey has continued for centuries. Jesus lives today. Whenever we celebrate someone's life at their Requiem or Memorial Service, we bring out the huge Easter candle and we proclaim, "Life has changed, not ended... Jesus lives... love is stronger than death..."

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the young German theologian killed by the Nazis on April 9, 1945, just three weeks before the war ended, wrote these words just before his death: "This is the end;

but for me, the beginning of life.” Bonhoeffer knew the truth of Easter. Death need not be the “last enemy” as St. Paul wrote. Rather, physical death can lead us to “the beginning of life.”

So, too, C. S. Lewis in his marvelous series of books – The Chronicles of Narnia – gives us a glimpse of heaven at the end. His last book in the series is *The Last Battle*. The adventures of Peter and Lucy and the others with the great lion, Aslan, are coming to both an end and “a new beginning.” Lewis writes:

“‘You do not look so happy as I mean you to be,’ Aslan says to Lucy. She replies, ‘We are so afraid of being sent away... you have sent us back so often...’ Aslan tells her, ‘The term is over; the holidays have begun. The dream is ended; this is the morning...’”

The narrator continues:

“And for us this is the end of all stories, and we can truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story... now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which goes on forever; in which every chapter is better than the one before...”

At every celebration of the Holy Eucharist, after blessing the bread and wine, I hold up the chalice and paten and I chant or say the final words, “...world without end...” or “...now and forever...” The Eucharist continues, it doesn’t end. When we receive the Body of Christ, we become the Body of Christ for the world. “...world without end... now and forever...”

Easter does not end. The Gospel stories do not end. Jesus lives. We won’t find him, we can’t follow him, if we look for the living among the dead. We won’t see Jesus living if we are silenced by our fears, by our doubts. Jesus calls us to live in His Risen Life, “now and forever.”