

The Rev. Joel Petruschke
Our Saviour/St. Stephen
Easter Sunday
March 31

Sisters and brothers in Christ, let us pray...May the words of my mouth and meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. AMEN.

“Choose your own adventure.”

That is the very strange Easter message in Mark’s Gospel.

“Choose your own adventure.”

PAUSE

For notice, there is NO resurrection appearance of Christ in this Gospel reading.

Seems a bit odd for Easter Sunday, doesn’t it, to have NO resurrection appearance?

But there it is.

The Gospel of Mark just ends quite abruptly.

Some women come to the tomb of Jesus early in the morning, having waited the appropriated time, having waited for the Sabbath Day to end.

Some women come to the tomb to anoint Jesus’ body.

And they are expecting to find a corpse.

But instead they find a man dressed in a white robe.

Not an angel per se, but a man dressed in a white robe.

And he tells them that Jesus has been raised.

PAUSE

But again, there is NO resurrection appearance of Jesus in Gospel’s Mark.

Instead the Gospel just ends quite abruptly, with the women fleeing the tomb and saying nothing to anyone, because terror and amazement had seized them.

Such a strange ending to Mark's Gospel.

PAUSE

And scholars have debated what this strange ending could possibly mean.

And those same scholars have surmised that when the words of the man at the tomb are considered more closely...

When we consider exactly what the man in the white robe is saying, Mark's Easter message comes into stark focus.

PAUSE

Now, this man in the white robe told the women that Jesus was raised. That he was not here.

But furthermore, the man told the women to tell the disciples and Peter that he (Jesus) is going ahead of them to Galilee.

And so, the message from the man is, "Go to Galilee, and there you will see Jesus."

This is the message of Mark's Gospel.

This is the resurrection message: Go to Galilee.

PAUSE

And Mark's Gospel then is a "choose your own adventure" kind of story.

We may remember those story books, those "choose your own adventure" books.

Where we are reading along, and we come to a choice in the story, such that we can decide to do one thing, and so turn to a particular page that is noted, or we can choose do something else, and turn to a different page that is noted.

And so the story evolves based on our decisions.

The story can go this way or that way, based on our choices.

“Choose your own adventure.”

PAUSE

And the Gospel writer Mark may have been the very first person to do this.

Mark may have invented this concept of a “choose your own adventure” story.

For we are told in Mark’s story by the man in the white robe, “You can choose to go to Galilee and see Jesus.”

Or, another option is, you can flee in terror and amazement and not say anything to anyone.

Or, you can do most anything else in response to this news that Jesus has been raised.

We can go home, for instance, and we can have our Easter meal of ham and all the fixings.

Or, we can go to Galilee and see Jesus.

Or, we can go home, and put up our feet, and take a nap, after all it has been a busy Holy Week.

Or, we can go to Galilee and see Jesus.

Or, we can go home, and watch a little television, or read a book, or go for a walk.

Or, we can go to Galilee and see Jesus.

PAUSE

You catch my drift. You get what I’m aiming at. You see what I am saying.

We SHOULD go to Galilee, because this is what the man in the white robe is telling us.

But I am not suggesting that we go to the airport right now, hop on a flight to the Holy Land, and literally travel to Galilee.

This is not what I am saying.

Nor is this what the Gospel writer Mark is suggesting.

Mark's Gospel is a "choose your own adventure," but it is a "choose your own adventure" similar to, in the same vein as, those books I was mentioning earlier.

But Mark doesn't give us a page number to turn to.

He doesn't write in his Gospel, "If you want to see the resurrected Jesus, go to page 340."

No instead, Mark gives us the name of a town as a reference point—Galilee.

Go to GALILEE and there you will see Jesus.

PAUSE

And so, if we were among those early Christians, living in the first century, and we were listening attentively to this story told to us, we would try to recall where "Galilee" was first mentioned in this story about Jesus.

As modern Christians, we have our own Bibles, which makes it a lot easier.

All we need to do is turn back to the beginning of the Mark's Gospel.

And if we were to return to the beginning of the Gospel, to the place where the word "Galilee" first appears, we come to these words...

"In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of GALILEE and was baptized by John in the River Jordan."

We go to "Galilee," the first reference to "Galilee" in Mark's Gospel, and there we find Jesus...

And we find Jesus at what important event?

We find Jesus at what occasion?

Baptism.

The reference to "Galilee" leads us to Jesus at the occasion of his baptism.

PAUSE

And that is significant, Friends.

That is significant because what the Gospel writer Mark is wont to say to us is that Mark's entire Gospel then, from the time of Jesus' baptism forward is one big resurrection appearance.

Mark's entire Gospel is a one extended resurrection appearance.

Go to Galilee, and there you will see Jesus.

There you will see Jesus being baptized. And there you will see the risen Lord.

So, whereas it appears at the end of Mark's Gospel there is NO resurrection appearance, in truth, all the Gospel of Mark has been one big resurrection appearance, because of baptism.

PAUSE

Baptism is the event by which Jesus is already living a new life.

And we are then to understand by this example of our Lord, that because we have been baptized, we, too, are already living a new life.

We are already living in the resurrection.

Eternity begins now, not at the end of life.

Eternity has begun already, because of baptism.

PAUSE

This is Mark's Easter message.

Baptism is closely, CLOSELY connected to the resurrection of our Lord.

We are baptized into the death and resurrection of our Lord.

Such that if we believe that we have died with Christ in baptism, then we have the certain hope of being raised with Christ, as he himself has been raised.

In baptism, we are relocated, transported into the very body of Christ.

Such that Christ's story of death and resurrection, becomes our story of death and resurrection, as experienced in baptism.

PAUSE

And the Gospel writer Mark is brilliant for he highlights this truth—Christ’s story of death and resurrection, becomes our story...

He highlights this truth by the image of this man in our Gospel reading who is clothed in a white robe.

For scholars believe that this man in a white robe actually represents an ancient Christian believer who has been baptized.

In the early Church, you see, a newly baptized person likely donned a new white robe, when they emerged from the waters of baptism.

And to make the point even stronger, that Christ’s story becomes our story through baptism, there is a mysterious reference to a similar man earlier in Mark’s gospel, just at the start of Jesus’ tribulations, at the start of Jesus’ journey to the crucifixion and resurrection.

It is probably one and the same man—there at the beginning of Jesus’ tribulations and there at his resurrection.

So Mark presents this man in the white robe as one who went through death and resurrection with Jesus Christ in the story, just like in baptism Jesus’ story has become our story.

Yes, we are closely tied to Jesus’ death and resurrection in baptism, such that Jesus’ story becomes our story.

PAUSE

And because baptism for Mark then is the beginning of new life, it is such that we are already living in eternity.

PAUSE

But as we know, Friends, much of life is what we make of it.

Life really is a “choose your own adventure.”

And so the question is “Do we choose to live out our baptism, so as to live life differently because of baptism?”

Do we choose to live life freed in Christ so as to praise and worship the Lord, and boldly proclaim Christ’s love in the world?

Or do we choose to let terror and amazement seize us?

PAUSE

One of my most favorite quotes speaks to choice.

The quote is this, “We should live life now such that heaven is not a surprise.”

“We should choose to live life now such that heaven is not a surprise.”

And what that means is that the glorification of God should be the compass of all our life, because that is how eternity in the Bible is described.

Our lives are to be lived in praise and in worship of God, we should glorify God, and proclaim Christ’s love, such that come the time of our crossing over into God’s presence, heaven will be no great surprise.

Because that is what heaven will be like.

PAUSE

So, today, the Easter message is for us a “choose your own adventure.”

Choose to give praise and worship to God in all we do and say. Choose to glorify God.

Choose to live out our baptism, and proclaim Christ’s love, for eternity has started already for us.

Christ’s story of death and resurrection, has become our story of death and resurrection.

Thanks be to God. AMEN.