

Easter People
I Corinthians 15:1-11; Mark 16:1-8

1 Corinthians 15:1-11 (New International Version)

¹Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. ²By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

³For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. ⁶After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, ⁸and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

⁹For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. ¹¹Whether, then, it was I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.

Mark 16:1-8 (New International Version)

¹When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. ²Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb ³and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"

⁴But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. ⁵As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.

⁶"Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. ⁷But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.' "

⁸Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

“Easter People”; what does it mean to be “Easter People?”

To help us answer that question we go back to John, the baptizer. You remember the story how he came out of the wilderness to the Jordan River preaching repentance and that one was coming after him whose sandals he was not worthy to tie. People came from all over to hear his message and be baptized by him. They asked him what they should do and he told them. “Tax collectors don’t take more than what you should” (we could use his message right now, couldn’t we). “Soldiers, be content with your wages.” And he even told King Herodias that he should give up his brother’s wife, that he was living in sin. Oh yes, he got into trouble for telling people what they should and should not do.

And, yes, Jesus, and perhaps those of his household meaning James and Jude and others who were called his sisters and brothers, were baptized. Please understand that I am just using my imagination and remember that it is my imagination. You can use your imagination as well.

Anyway, many, many people were baptized. And in that baptism John was saying that you did not have to go to the Temple to have your sins forgiven, you did not have to offer sacrifices of animals or to pay for animals that the Temple owned for sacrifice. People flocked to the river to be baptized by John so the Temple lost a lot of revenue over this. The Temple also lost some of its popularity because the attention was focused on John and his baptizing.

So, what happened? Well we know that John was arrested and thrown into prison and that later he was beheaded – killed. John was taken away from the river and his ministry was done. He was beheaded – the leader was killed and so his followers were without leadership, they were done.

But along came Jesus and he did not need the river. He went inland, even away from the river. He changed John’s message just a little bit – indeed quite a bit. John said, “Repent and be baptized for one is coming who is greater than I. I baptize with water but he will baptize with the Holy Spirit. He will take away the sins of the world. The reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel.”

John pointed Jesus out to his followers and some of them, perhaps many, turned to Jesus. Jesus not only said that the Kingdom of God was coming but that it was among them. God’s kingdom was governed by love and justice and was not a kingdom of this earth. Love was the love of God. Justice in God’s program was that all may receive a fair portion of his creation.

During the final Passover Feast of his ministry, when he knew that what happened to John was going to happen to him, only in a different way, (he was crucified) he had a special agape meal – a love feast, with his disciples. As a Servant Leader he washed their feet and then gave special meaning to that Last Supper. He took the bread and said that this was a symbol of his body that would be broken for them and for the world. He took the cup, after supper and said that the wine it contained symbolized his life which would be given for them and for the world. And every time they did this they would be reminded of the new commandment that he was giving them. “A new command I give you: as I have loved you, so you must love one

another,” he said. “All...will know that you are my disciples if you love one another” (John 13:33-34).

Not only did you not have to go to the Temple to experience God’s love, to be where God dwelled – you didn’t even have to go to the river to find God. Wherever Jesus is you can find God and he will find you. At his crucifixion we are told that the curtain in the temple separating the people from the holy of holies was torn from top to bottom – not from the bottom up, indicating this was an act of God so that anyone could enter, not just the priest. It also revealed that God was not contained behind those curtains. A new age had begun. John Dominic Crosson put it this way, “God’s great clean-up had begun!”

It’s not something that is going to be some day. In Jesus it has begun! And how long will it take? Some thought it would happen in that first century but they got it wrong. But it has begun and it has come a long way. It has a long way to go and some days it seems that it takes three steps backward for every step it has taken forward but there are other days when it seems like it has moved ahead beyond our ability to imagine. But it has begun and God will accomplish what he has begun – no matter how long it takes.

The same powers that put John to death put Jesus to death. The way to get rid of a movement was to put the leader to death and his followers would scatter. It worked that way with John and it seemed to work that way with Jesus because when he was arrested it says that they all forsook him in his hour of need. Even Peter, their fearless leader – now not so fearless, denied knowing Jesus three times before the sun rose that following morning.

But, as we now know, God did something with Jesus; he brought him back from the dead. God vindicated him. Justice was served. By vindicating Jesus God was telling the world that Jesus is Lord over all, not Caesar; that Jesus has the true authority – in fact all authority in heaven and on earth and Caesar does not. In fact, love and forgiveness is more powerful than the mightiest military, political and religious powers in the world. Jesus forgave those who crucified him while on the Cross. He forgave Peter and the disciples for forsaking him in his hour of need. He prepared a breakfast on the lakeshore and invited them all to eat. He counseled with Peter asking him if he loved him and Peter said that he did. The power of love and forgiveness is immeasurable!

To be an Easter people is to be a follower of Jesus Christ and to love others as he has loved us. To be an Easter people is to forgive others as we have been forgiven. To be an Easter people is to be a part of what God has begun.

To be an Easter people is to believe in the resurrection of the Jesus. Those early Christians really believed in Jesus resurrection much more so than his birth. If you were to take out the stories of Jesus’ birth in the New Testament you would lose the first chapter of Matthew and the first two chapters of Luke. You would still have a good New Testament even without those birth stories. I’m not suggesting you do that – this is for illustration purposes only. But if you were to take out the stories of Jesus’ resurrection there would not be much left. What was

left would dissolve into nothing and there would be no reason for even having a New Testament.

Easter people are not afraid of death because Jesus won the victory over death. Easter people have everything to live for and nothing to fear in the life to come.

October 2007 seems like only yesterday when we began our lives together. God has rekindled among us that power of loving one another as he has loved us. Or, another way to put it is that what He has begun in us at our baptism has been renewed. Oh there are pockets here and there that have been resistant but it has begun. To be an Easter people is to continue in what God has begun, to obey his new commandment to love one another as he has loved us. By doing that we are showing that we are his disciples because we obey him and in that obedience we love one another. And you don't have to go down to the river or to the temple. Jesus is right there in our time of need.

We began our ministry with you with these verses in Ephesians 3:20-21: "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever. Amen." Did you imagine that God would do all that he has done in these short 18 months? I did not.

As we talked about core values in these last few months these verses from John 13:33-34 came to the forefront: "A new commandment I give you," says Jesus. "Love one another. As I have loved you so you must love one another. All men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another."

We must continue to believe that God is able to do far more than we can even imagine and we must continue to obey his command to love one another as he has loved us. I know that is what you desire above all and by doing this you are ready for the pastor that God has prepared to come your way.

May God bless this message to our hearts and implant its truth in the depths of our souls.

Amen.

*Hymn # 222, Easter Song

Benediction (see bulletin insert)

Litany of Farewell (invite Moderator and Chairperson of Deaconate to join in)