

EASTER VIGIL HOMILY – 2015
Mark 16:1-8

That's it? Really? That's the end? The three women who discover the empty tomb are so terrified and amazed, so bewildered and afraid, they run away and they don't tell anyone?

That's not a very satisfying ending, is it? But then, as we all know, it's not the ending. Two thousand years have passed since that morning, and we haven't reached the ending yet.

The Gospel of Mark can be somewhat abrupt. Not much in there in the way of extended narratives. We tend to think of the Resurrection story as more extensive, more detailed, because we merge all of the four gospel versions together in our minds.

The Gospel of Matthew concludes with the Great Commission, in which Jesus himself, appearing to his disciples, tells them to "Go forth and baptize all nations" and encourages them with the words, "I will be with you always." The Gospel of Luke contains the beautiful story of the Road to Emmaus in which Jesus appears on the road alongside two of his disciples who are walking away sadly from Jerusalem, their hopes dashed, their hearts broken. They don't recognize him until later in the evening, when he breaks bread with them – and then they know: he is risen, and he is among them. And in the Gospel of John, Jesus appears to the devastated Mary Magdalene, alone in the garden on Easter morning, and exhorts her to "go and tell the others" - which she runs to do.

All of these stories swirl about in our imaginations as we recall that first Easter morning. And all together they offer us a fuller picture of the resurrected Jesus as he was first experienced by his closest followers and friends. But none of them tells us the ending either – because we ourselves are part of the story, we ourselves are called to recognize Jesus.

If we take Mark's gospel reading just one verse further (verse 8), we hear: "Then they went out and fled from the tomb, seized with trembling and bewilderment. They said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid."

The reality of the resurrection is dramatic, and earth-shattering, and threatening – and a response of fear and trembling, of terror and amazement, would be entirely appropriate.

The story has not ended at all! It does not end with the bewilderment, with the terrified responses of the women. It does not end for them and it hasn't ended for us. We are the continuation of the story.

Tonight, we are "carriers of light." We are bearers of hope, of dignity, of love. This evening, we are reminded of that. The candles we carried at the beginning of this liturgy spread person to person, flame to flame. This sacred candle, representing the very light of Christ, became a part of every one of us. And so we became, each of us, a "carrier of light."

That means we share in the beauty, the wonder, and the illumination of this wondrous night. We share in the joyous news that Christ is risen. And it means that we need to share that good news, that light, with others. And share it, we do.

According to the USCCB, last year, in the United States, there were over 830-thousand infant baptisms. 43-thousand adult baptisms. Nearly 73-thousand people received into full communion with the church.

The light just keeps spreading. And we're adding to it tonight, here and now, with those candidates joining our church (Jane, Gregory and Sarah).

When I stand here and watch this miracle unfold, I am moved and inspired by the love and commitment of those who have chosen to become a part of our faith. And it connects beautifully to a message in tonight's gospel.

You'll remember that the young man in the tomb said to the women, "Do not be amazed!"

How could they not be? How could they contain the wonder at what they were seeing?

But yet he told them: This shouldn't surprise you. Jesus has been raised. He is not here. He will meet them in Galilee.

As the sun began to dawn in Jerusalem on that morning 2,000 years ago, a timeless truth dawned, as well. Jesus is not to be found among the dead...he is among the living.

You won't find him in an empty tomb made of rock. You will find him in Galilee, among fishermen. You will find him on the road to Emmaus, in the breaking of the bread. You will find him in churches around the world this night, where these candles burn like stars. You will find him in hospices and hospitals, in orphanages and shelters. Jesus is where hope fights despair, where love battles injustice, where compassion dries the tears of the suffering.

You will find him here, among these candidates, and all who fervently want to spread that light.

Do not be amazed that God keeps his promises. Instead, be amazed at God's great, enduring love – a love that prevails through history, in spite of our sinfulness and our brokenness.

Be amazed instead at God's astounding mercy and generous concern for humanity – as the Exsultet says, “To ransom a slave, you gave away your son.”

Be amazed that we are blessed to carry on what God's son began – and have done it for over 20 centuries. It only happens by God's grace.

Be amazed that we are blessed to be here tonight, gathered under this roof, joined together as one family of faith, holding candles in our hands and singing alleluias on our lips.

When you leave this sacred space tonight, take that flame with you in your heart. Remember what it represents. Remember who we are.

And remember this: in a world that seems so often overwhelmed by the dark...**miraculously, joyously, amazingly**, we are called to be blessed to be – “carriers of light.”

Deacon Greg Cecere

April 4, 2015

(excerpted from Deacon Greg Kandra (Apr 7, 2012))