

“Easter Fools”

April 1, 2018
Mark 16: 1-8

Rev. Kimberly Heath
Wall Street United Church

Here is the scripture reading for this week:

Mark 16:1-8 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. They had been saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?” When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, “Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.”

So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

There is no question that we live in a crazy world and it’s hard to know what to make of it. Take a listen to an excerpt of this news piece I read just this morning from local reporter Ron Zajac.

It can also be found by clicking on this link: <http://ronaldzajac.com/node/320>

“The Brockville Police Service, working in conjunction with a special Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) election interference task force, has unearthed a Russian conspiracy to hack Brockville’s October 22 municipal election. ...

A few sources inside city police and at least one source within CSIS, all of whom requested anonymity ... confirm a Russian national named Anatoli Durakov has been secretly communicating with as-yet-unnamed local political activists to coordinate an elaborate social media campaign and hacking operation to get a candidate of choice elected mayor of Brockville.

In a rare slip-up for Moscow's usually efficient active measures operators, Durakov was arrested in Brockville last week and remains in detention at a federal facility. ...

Leaked files from Durakov's interrogation so far reveal that Moscow's candidate of choice for Brockville's next mayor is "Oscar the Otter."

CSIS officials were still trying to determine whether the Kremlin actually thinks the Aquatarium mascot could become the city's next mayor, winning through a combination of Rhinoceros-Party-style satirical protest campaigning and election-night vote machine rigging, or whether "Oscar" is a codename for an unnamed candidate, widely believed to be Lirpa Loof.

*Other tidbits from the Durakov questioning are more concrete:
* While they might be keen on installing the Aquatarium otter as mayor, officials in the Kremlin want their Manchurian Candidate, if elected, to undermine and even destroy Brockville's tourism industry; Durakov revealed Russian President Vladimir Putin was personally outraged to learn recently that Brockville's Railway Tunnel has a higher TripAdvisor rating than Saint Petersburg."*

What's the date again today? Oh right ... April 1st! Today is the high holy day of April Fools.

I can't help but wonder if Easter is the ultimate April Fool's joke. 'You thought I was a goner but guess what? I'm baaaack!!'

What do we make of Easter? There are many who don't take the resurrection very seriously. Certainly, there are parts of the scriptures that are more myth-like. The Creation story is like that, and so is Noah's Ark. There are truths in the stories and maybe even some bits that are based in history, but they are not meant to be taken literally or historically. It would be easy to put the resurrection along with other challenging miracles in that category. But the way the story is put together and told makes it clear — this was no myth.

I recommend to you the movie "*The Case For Christ*". It's on Netflix, and is based on the book written by Lee Strobel about his surprising transformation from militant atheist to passionate Christian. His wife had converted to Christianity and that was very disturbing for Strobel, who was convinced she was being brainwashed. He just couldn't wrap his head around it.

Lee Strobel was a journalist for the Chicago Tribune. (I don't need to tell you that it's a big deal to work there as an investigative reporter.) He decided to use what he knew best how to do: to investigate Christianity and prove it was a hoax. He decided the place to start was the

Resurrection. As one Christian in his office told him: “If the resurrection of Jesus didn’t happen, it’s a house of cards.”

So he travelled across the country interviewing historians, archeologists and other scholars. In the end, not only is he unable to disprove the resurrection of Jesus, but he ends up, very reluctantly at first, having to admit that he thought it was very likely true. Here’s the trailer to the movie “*The Case for Christ*.”

<https://youtu.be/rhe8KhSxWGo>

Lee Strobel became and is today a very strong Christian. If you do believe in the resurrection, or are at least a little bit open to believing it, the next question to ask is: what is its significance?

Last Wednesday, at our Lenten noon-hour service, Shirley Avery shared with us several 8x10 images taken from the children’s Godly Play Easter story. The last image that Shirley shared with us had a picture of Jesus being crucified on one side, and the Risen Christ on the other. All the other pictures in the story are one-sided; but this one is double-sided because, as Shirley explained, you can’t separate those two. You can’t separate Good Friday from Easter Sunday — neither has any meaning without the other. We have to look to the death on a cross in order to understand the resurrection.

There is something about darkness and depression and fear and grief that always makes it feel like it will close in and never get any better, but only get worse. Certainly, you feel that in Jesus’ descent from arrest and interrogation to condemnation and torture and execution in a most horrible way. There’s just no getting out of that downward spiral. When they were mocking Jesus and saying “He saved others, couldn’t he save himself?” maybe they wondered if he would at the last minute perform some miracle to save himself. But he didn’t. He stayed there and willingly endured the pain and went into the darkest of places. I do believe it was for me and for you. It was an act of great love, and by it in ways I can’t understand, death is ultimately defeated. “*O death where is thy sting? O grave where is thy victory?*” 1 Corinthians 15:55.

Suffering continues to be a part of this life. Because of the cross, we know that in our suffering *we are not alone*. God knows your pain and sees your tears, and he is there with you. Because of the resurrection we can have unshakable confidence that we will get through it. We will walk through those dark valleys and come out on the other side. Suffering, fear, depression and death like to lie to us and tell us there is no escape. The resurrection says: This. Is. Not. The. End!

When I was young and stressed out about something (usually the crush of exams and term papers being due) my father would often say to me “Kimberly, this too shall pass.” The expression dates back centuries to a Sufi poet, but it seems to me to fit at Easter. In this life we will suffer, but our suffering will not be the end.

For me the resurrection means that however long the winter of life feels, spring will return. What feels impossible to you? What relationship, what issue, what hurt that has never healed feels like it will never be over? When you live in the power of the resurrection you begin to see where there is hope.

Living in the power of the resurrection gives me hope for the gun issue in the United States. Who knows, it may get worse before it gets better, but I have hope that things will change and I am filled with hope at



the seeds of life in the **‘March for our Lives/ Never Again’** movement.

I get overwhelmed by the injustices of the past with regard to Native peoples — the disregarding of treaties, the systemic racism, the residential schools and incredible abuses, the 60’s scoop and all of the consequences of the systemic decades and centuries of racism, and I think there’s no way out. Death tells me there’s no way to fix this, it will always be bad.

The resurrection tells me that’s a lie — there is hope! It may start small, it may start on a cold dark morning that does not look promising, and where there are enormous rocks blocking the way. It may start with the small actions of someone like me or you who feels insanely insignificant... but it won’t stay there. As we live in the power of Easter — as we live as a people who have journeyed through the death of Good Friday and into the life and resurrection of Easter Sunday, we live differently. We live with hope. We live with the knowledge that life wins.

In our Easter reading from Mark, the women go to the tomb to bring spices to anoint the body. The women go worrying about the impossible task of rolling away a very large stone and still expecting to be met with death. When they arrive, the stone has been moved and they find no death. They are met with an empty tomb. An angel tells them Jesus is risen and has gone on ahead of them to Galilee. But what makes Mark’s gospel fascinating is how it ends with verse 8: “*So they went out and fled from the*

tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid."

Now the early church wasn't very comfortable with this ending and so they added a little bit and then a couple of decades later a little more was added (If you open your Bible to the Gospel of Mark and go to the end, you can see how they clearly mark the end, and then add another shorter ending and then yet another longer ending).

Most scholars believe that the gospel originally ended with the first part of verse 8. "*So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.*" End of story. That's it.

I like it. It's honest and it's kind of funny. If they actually told no one anything... how come you and I are here this morning more than 2000 years later? Someone said something! There ought to have been a 😊 'winky face' at the end of that verse! Because Mark's gospel ends...but clearly it isn't finished. There's more to the story ... much more.

Are we foolish to believe the Resurrection? Maybe we are. Maybe we should be. The apostle Paul says that "God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength." (1 Cor. 1:25) He then goes on to call Jesus followers "Fools for the sake of Christ." (1 Cor. 4:10).

We do live in a crazy world, and it really is hard to know what to make of it. The Russians may or may not hack our elections and cause Oscar the Otter to be Mayor, but whatever large or small challenges that come our way, we are not alone. The angel told the women at the tomb that Jesus had gone ahead of them. He has gone ahead of you too. This Easter may you be foolish enough to follow him into a life of hope, of courage, and of resurrection.

Christ is Risen! He is Risen Indeed!

Amen and thanks be to God!