

Mark 16:1-7

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."

1 Corinthians 15:1-11, NRSVUE

Now I want you to understand, brothers and sisters, the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand, through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you—unless you have come to believe in vain. For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures and that he was buried and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I but the grace of God that is with me. Whether then it was I or they, so we proclaim and so you believed.

Are you excited about the eclipse? I'm super psyched about it and fascinated by it. The eclipse is this astronomical phenomenon whereby we stand completely in the shadow of the moon. This event is both not rare and extremely rare. Eclipses happen every 18 to 24 months somewhere in the world. But often they are in places like the Pacific Ocean. This time around it's crossing over Mexico, central US, and eastern Canada — most of Canada will see something of the eclipse. But a thin strip which includes Brockville will experience the total eclipse for 2 minutes and 47 seconds.

An eclipse as viewed from Indonesia in 2016.*Miloslav Druckmüller*



I have never seen a total eclipse — the odds are that most of you haven't either. From what I hear, it is an experience that you shouldn't miss. When the moon covers the sun, it is a freaky experience, that dusk-like darkness in the middle of day — but the eclipse allows us to see things we can't see without it.

Eclipses allow us to see the sun's Corona, the outer atmosphere of the sun. It was

during an eclipse that they found a new chemical element, Helium, and named it for the Greek Sun god, Helios. Albert Einstein's theory of General Relativity said that massive objects would bend space and time. An eclipse in 1919 proved he was right. You see, if you could look at the stars behind the sun, you would be able to tell if they were where Einstein said they should be. But how do you see faint distant stars when the bright sun is in the way? You need an eclipse.

Every year we *remember* the death and resurrection of Jesus. We remember that the Son of God, the author of life, died. We remember that from that afternoon on the Friday until the Sunday morning it seemed that beautiful life and light would never shine again. In fact, maybe you remember the little detail that during the crucifixion *darkness descended on the land in the middle of the day*. Maybe an eclipse, maybe dark clouds, but there was a sense of pathetic fallacy of nature being in concert, in sympathy with the great loss. We remember the grief and the terror. And then we remember that glorious day when the stone in front of the tomb where Jesus was laid was removed — and Jesus was not in the tomb.

Even more than watching an eclipse, experiencing the death and then the resurrection of Jesus would have been a transforming, unimaginable experience. Ever year we try to remember and re-experience what others have experienced. But it's not so easy. Maybe it's a bit like someone telling you about an eclipse instead of seeing it with your own eyes. The Brockville City website has a simulation of the eclipse — of what it will be like. The simulation is pretty cool, but it's not the same as seeing the real thing. It's hard for us to comprehend something like the death and resurrection of Jesus because it just seems so removed from us. It is removed from us by **time** and by the **challenges of life**.

Easter and resurrection are nice thoughts. But what does it mean when you walk past someone, as I did last Sunday night, sleeping in the bus shelter wrapped in a sleeping bag when the temperature is going down to -10? What does it mean when your marriage falls apart? What does it mean when you've lost someone you love? What does it mean when war and famine kills countless innocent people in Gaza, in Sudan, in Haiti and in Ukraine? Somehow Easter lilies and Easter hymns fall a little flat. And Easter is removed from us by **time**, by two thousand years.

But this was a concern even for Paul. He was concerned that people were forgetting and no longer living in the power of the resurrection because it had been a few years. Some were turning the resurrection into a nice idea, something spiritual, a bit 'airy-fairy' instead of something that happened physically. That Jesus actually died, was buried and then came to life. So Paul reminds them of what took place and he reminds them of how Jesus appeared to people. Paul doesn't mention the women, but he talks about how Peter/Cephas and the other disciples saw Jesus die and saw him raised from death and were forever changed by the experience. **For Paul, that reliable testimony and witness to the resurrection of Jesus is the foundation on which the church**

stands. And for Paul, the way we experience the resurrection is through the proclamation, through the testimony of others who have experienced it.

But wait a minute — Paul puts himself in the list of those who were witnesses to it! But he wasn't there! He wasn't one of the twelve! Paul calls himself “untimely born” meaning that he was late to the party. Paul was **not there** when Jesus died on the cross or when Jesus emerged from the tomb. In fact, though Jesus “appeared” to Paul, it was different from how Jesus appeared to the others. About 40 days after Jesus' resurrection, the gathered disciples saw Jesus rise to heaven. This is called the Ascension. It was after the Ascension that Jesus appeared to Paul.

Paul is much, much closer in time to the death and resurrection of Jesus than we are. Paul's letters were written before the gospel accounts of the resurrection. But Paul is more like us than Peter. Like us, he relies on the testimony of others. We're all late to the party, late to the resurrection experience. Or are we? Paul relied on what he had seen in others, but also on his own personal experience of Jesus after Jesus' time on earth. Do you remember Paul's experience on the road to Damascus where he was blinded by the light and heard Jesus speaking to him, asking him ‘*Why are you persecuting my church?*’ That experience profoundly changed him. Paul's life becomes a living testimony of the resurrection of Jesus — his whole life did a 180° change. Talk about a transformation!

We too are untimely born when it comes to having lived at the exact time of the death and resurrection of Jesus. We need to listen to the experience of Mary and the other witnesses, but like Paul, we are not too late to experience the resurrection. After all, Christ *is* Risen. Not Christ *was* Risen. Jesus is alive! We can experience that life, that hope today.

What does that look like today? I've been given permission to share the stories of two members of our congregation, Rachel and Alison. I remember the time Rachel came and sat in my office. She was not in a very good space. She was faced with a difficult decision of needing to leave Brockville and go back home for awhile. It was not something she wanted to do. She had friends and connections in Brockville but at that point nowhere to live, and it was possible that she could end up homeless. Once someone ends up homeless — not only are there the incredible challenges of keeping warm and finding places to sleep and use a washroom and stay safe— but the odds of addiction taking hold (along with any mental health issues being created or spiking out of control) are high. She remembers me asking her where she imagined herself being in one year. This was a hopeful imagination exercise, inspired by our own church's visioning. She imagined living in Brockville, singing with the church singers and working with children. After she imagined it and we prayed about it, the next question was: if that's the hope for one year, what do you need to do now for this to happen? In that moment she knew that she needed to go home, away from Brockville, for a time, so that she could return here on more solid ground. Last week Rachel realized that

what she'd hoped for and dreamed of had all taken place. She's back here in Brockville, sings on Sundays and now is working with children! She told me how recently there was a child who was struggling to bond with people, and the child was bonding with her! Someone told her that she had a real aptitude with kids with special needs. This isn't luck — this is resurrection hope.

One more story from our congregation. We've been praying for Alison and Taylor. Alison has a terminal cancer diagnosis. Her daughter Taylor was in a terrible snowmobile accident about a month ago north of Quebec City. It could have killed her. She was rushed to a trauma centre in Québec, and it was so bad they could not transfer her to Toronto, which would have been much closer to home. Of course, they were afraid that she might have broken her back and that she might be a quadra or paraplegic. As it was, she had broken her pelvis and had to undergo emergency surgery. Thank God the surgery went really well and eventually she was able to be transferred to hospital closer to home and then to a rehab hospital. Soon she will be discharged home, though her recovery will still be long. When I asked her mother how they both got through this, the answer was "By the grace of God and through so many prayers". Alison shared how just after the accident, while she was still laying in the snow, she had the thought that she was going to have to start doing deep and slow meditative breathing to get through it, and so she did. As she waited for her partner to get to her and then the longer wait for the emergency crews, she kept focussing on her breathing, and felt a peace. While she was in hospital, she had a vivid dream of lying on a rock with colourful ribbons waving over her. When Alison first shared this with me, we both felt the ribbons were the prayers of so many, and that the rock was the Rock of Jesus, holding her firm.

Those are two resurrection stories. But there are so many! I look to Dani, courageously able to live as herself in a world that is increasingly hostile to transgendered people. I look at people sharing a warm breakfast on Good Friday morning. I love that Brockville does the Walk of the Cross – so few communities do! And I love that we were feeding hungry people who might have had to sleep in a bus shelter the night before, at the exact same time as the walk! Both are important – both are signs of hope and resurrection in a world that is too familiar with pain and struggle. These are real world stories of struggle and God's life and hope holding us and carrying us forward. How are you living because of the resurrection? Our real-life stories of faith and hope continue to be built on the testimony of others and our own experience of Jesus alive in us.

When the moon covers the sun, it is a powerful experience to see everything go dusky-dark. We can see things we never could before. I wonder if part of our job as Christians is to stand in front of the Sun? So that by looking at our lives, people might see Jesus in a way that they never could before.

May we be people transformed by the risen Christ. May we be people who live in faith, in resurrection courage — so that others might see Jesus through our lives. Thanks be to God.