

## **Easter Sunday**

### Message: He's Out!

"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."

Am I the only crazy one, or does that strike anyone else here as a really weird Bible story for Easter Sunday morning?

I thought the story was supposed to be all about joy and celebration, you know...return of spring, with chocolate bunnies and flowers, marshmallow crème, Peeps and colored eggs!

But there it is: 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.

And it isn't just the end of our Bible passage for today! No, this is the end of Mark's gospel! This is apparently how the writer named Mark chose to stop his narration! The writer who came out of the chute with a bang, exclaiming in his opening verses, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, Son of God!", now chooses to conclude in a whimper with the disciples cowering in terror!

What's up with that?

Let's see if we can put a contemporary spin on the events and see if it helps shed some light on the situation...

Picture in your mind your very best, closest friend – the one who has been with you through thick and thin; one who has been there with you when you've laughed and wept; one who loves you enough to repeatedly cheer your successes, grieve your failures, but who won't let you pull any crap, either!

Now, imagine that one day you learn that through some bizarre, twisted set of events and circumstances your best friend has been arrested for a terrible murder!

As the reports of the crime filter down to you, you realize that, just as you suspect, it's all rumors, lies, half-truths, and vicious slander: someone is out to railroad your friend! Someone is setting him up!

And as you listen to the report, suddenly you realize that you know the truth about the event! You alone know what really happened! You alone know and can testify to the innocence of your friend. You and you alone can set him free.

And you do nothing! You say nothing to anyone. You don't go to the cops, you don't talk to lawyers. You never even go visit your friend while he sits in jail awaiting trial!

And the trial! The trial ends up being a joke: the judge is the victim's sister, the jury is comprised of his best friends and neighbors. And still you do nothing! You never go forward. Not once do you stand up and say, "Hold on now!"

You just let it happen because you are afraid...

And your best friend is found guilty. And then the sentencing...

TV cameras are there, rolling, recording the sights and sounds as your friend is marched through the iron gates of the maximum security prison. You hear the bars slam shut with a sound of metallic thunder...and he's gone.

Now, it's three days later...your phone rings, and it's another friend of yours on the line.

Almost breathlessly, she asks, "Have you heard the news?"

"No! Heard what?"

"Your friend! Your friend! He's out! He escaped sometime early this morning! He's out and they say he's looking for you!"

You drop the phone – terror and amazement grip you! How could this happen? Then it really hits you – he's looking for you! Now what do you do? Where can you run? Where can you hide? The friend you betrayed is out! He's on the loose and he's looking for you!

Well. There you have it! There you have the situation that faced those disciples that early Easter morning. And it faces each one of us today.

Who here this morning has not accused God of crimes ranging from pettiness to indifference to blatant acts of misery and death against us the human race?

Who among us has not said, "Well, if God is so loving then why \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank).

Who has not said, "Well, if God is so powerful, then why \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank).

Who here this morning has never cursed God for consequences that have arisen from our own human brokenness and sin?

And not content with simply betraying our God, who here this morning has not sat as judge and jury, pronounced him guilty and sentenced him to death?

And I am here this morning to tell you that very God, the one whom you betray, slander, mock, abuse, torture and execute...that if you came this morning to stand around and gawk at the tomb of the God you killed...

He is not here! He is risen! He's out...he's on the loose and he's looking for you!

Mark ended his narrative with the seemingly scary exclamation, "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."

That's the end of his narrative, but it's not the end of the story! Radio personality Paul Harvey used to have short human-interest stories that he would relate in pieces, always ending with an uplifting surprise when you learn the final truth – when you hear the rest of the story.

What you've heard this morning so far is like that. We began our service this morning with words of confession: "Most merciful God – we confess that we are in bondage to sin and we cannot free ourselves. We have sinned against you in our thoughts, in our words and in our deeds. We have not loved you with our whole heart. We have not loved our neighbors as our selves." By the power of the Holy Spirit of Jesus in your heart you know what you have heard is true.

But you need to hear the rest of the story! Here it is:

Our God is out! He's out of the grave we dug for him. He's been raised from the death we condemned him to. He's looking for you, and you, and you...

Like a cosmic bloodhound, God in Christ Jesus has tracked you down to this time, this place. He's cornered you in this room this morning to tell you...

"Almighty God in his mercy has given his Son to die for you and for his sake forgives you all our sins. As a called and ordained minister of the Church of Christ, and by his authority, I get to declare to you the entire forgiveness of all your sins, in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit!"

...you're forgiven! All the hurt, the half-truths, slander and lies, the gossip, the prejudice, the indifference, the injustice, the hate, the violence is forgiven.

And not just that which we have inflicted on God, but on each other! It's all forgiven! And he did it all for you!

The God who's birth so many of us want to celebrate at Christmas and then stuff back in a box until next December has broken out! God in Christ Jesus refuses to be stuffed in a box like a tree ornament and hid away in a closet. And he refuses to be stuffed in a box like a coffin and hid away in a grave!

He's out...he's been looking for you! And just now, he found you! And he forgives you!

Thanks be to God!