

Sermon for Easter Sunday, Year B

The Text: Mark 16:1-8 (ESV)

Dear heavenly Father, send your Holy Spirit on us so we may believe the message of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today's sermon is brought to you by the letter 'R'.

'R' stands for Resurrection, Reconciliation, and Restoration.

Now, most of us would normally expect to hear about the resurrection of Jesus Christ on Easter Sunday. But we might not always expect to hear about reconciliation and restoration. Yet it's because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ that reconciliation and restoration also take place.

Let's see how this happens in our text for today.

We hear how three women were coming to the tomb of Jesus Christ, expecting to add spices to his body since his burial had taken place in hurried circumstances. When they got there to discover the stone had already been rolled away, and they saw a young man sitting in a white robe.

Not surprisingly, they were a little freaked out about this, but the young man told them not to be alarmed. You see, Jesus of Nazareth wasn't there any longer because he's risen. He even invited them to check it out and they'd see he wasn't there. Then he told them to announce this news to the disciples...and to Peter.

Isn't this a little surprising? Wasn't Peter one of the disciples? Why mention Peter by name? Why did Peter specifically need to hear this news of Jesus' resurrection? How was this resurrection news related to his reconciliation and restoration?

Now, it helps to be reminded what had happened to Peter during the lead up to Jesus' death and burial.

Remember, Peter didn't want to be included in Jesus' washing, and then when he finally agreed, he wanted his whole body washed. Peter just didn't understand what Jesus was doing.

Peter had proudly boasted he would never deny Jesus, as if to say he was better than every other disciple and would be stronger and better than any of the others. But he had failed so miserably. He had denied

Jesus...three times! Despite his pride, he failed because he had abandoned Jesus.

Even though he was one of Jesus' favoured ones, Peter had fallen asleep in the garden when he should have stayed awake while Jesus prayed. He'd become complacent in his following of Jesus.

Peter was the one who resorted to violence in order to save Jesus, slicing off a slave's ear. He totally misunderstood the kingdom of God doesn't come through such acts of violence. The violence instead was to be done to Jesus, not his enemies.

Peter had become pride-filled and complacent. He had misunderstood and had ended up denying his Lord. He had resorted to violence instead of peace. He had now ostracized himself from his Lord and cut himself off from his brother disciples. So, in this context, we would understand Peter needed to hear some good news. The women were told to announce specifically to Peter that Jesus has risen and will meet him in Galilee.

And so, this is the gospel; this is the message of Easter: Jesus died for Peter. Jesus' resurrection was for Peter. It's through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that reconciliation and restoration could now be offered to Peter. The young man told the women that there is good news for Peter: despite what Peter has done, Jesus is offering him forgiveness, life, and salvation.

Even though Peter's name was specifically mentioned on that Easter morning, I wonder whose names would be there today?

Would your name come up? Would my name come up? "Tell the disciples...and tell (your name) that Jesus is risen!"

Or would someone else's name come up? What about those who aren't here today and may feel cut off from our congregation? Who has excluded themselves from our fellowship out of shame, frustration, denial, or complacency? Is there someone in our lives who needs to hear Jesus Christ has risen specifically for them, and that he now offers reconciliation to their heavenly Father, and wants to restore them into loving service within the family of God?

You see, we're often like Peter, but we're not the only 'Peters' in the world. There are so many individuals like Peter who still need to hear the good news.

While the Bible teaches us all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, some of us are more aware of this than others. Sometimes we've excluded these sinful people from our fellowship, but sometimes we've removed ourselves.

Sometimes it's because of our sin that we feel we don't deserve a place among the holy ones of God, and so we exclude ourselves out of guilt. We feel as if our sin is ever before us and we struggle to admit our guilt. We've failed God, failed ourselves, and failed each other. Because we've failed and let each other and God down, we exclude ourselves from God's grace and seek to punish ourselves. Pride keeps us from hearing the message of Jesus' resurrection which leads to peace and joy. Pride keeps us from being reconciled. Pride keeps us from restoration.

Sometimes we remove ourselves through complacency. One week of absence becomes three and then ten. We start to forget what Jesus looks like and what he sounds like. The whispers of love and forgiveness no longer echo in our lives. Instead of staying alert, the lies of the devil put us to sleep, and we excluded ourselves from the fellowship of the disciples out of laziness. Laziness and complacency keep us from hearing the message of Jesus' resurrection which would resurrect our own struggling faith. Laziness keeps us from being reconciled.

Complacency keeps us from restoration.

Other times we feel soiled and unholy. We wonder how God could ever love someone like us, and so we may also exclude ourselves from the fellowship of believers out of shame. In this case, shame keeps us from hearing the message of Jesus' resurrection which leads to wholeness and healing. Shame keeps us from being reconciled. Shame keeps us from experiencing restoration.

So, in this way, we see Peter in ourselves. The guilt or shame of sin dictated Peter's reactions and they also dictate ours. Sin tells us a great number of lies that we believe. Sin obscures the truth of Jesus Christ and what he's done for us. We'd rather believe the lies of pride, complacency, and shame than believe the truth of Christ's death and resurrection for us.

Tell Peter. Tell Peter Jesus goes ahead of him. Tell Peter Jesus will meet him.

The message of Easter isn't just a general message of victory over the grave, but a very personal message to people like you and me. Jesus knows each of us by name. He's called us by name and claimed us with his own name at our baptism.

Through Jesus' death he offers each of us forgiveness and cleansing for all our sins. This forgiveness offers us full reconciliation with God the Father. There's no guilt and there's no shame too powerful that can't be washed clean through the shedding of Jesus' holy blood.

But now Jesus has risen from the dead. He rose for each one of us.

Through Jesus' resurrection he offers us eternal life through faith – life which is reconciled and restored in peace with the Father and the Son and the Spirit. He offers each of us restoration to wellness and service as one of his disciples. We're not useless. We're not broken. We're not soiled. We're not such a failure God can't or won't restore each of us to life and love and joy in our willing service to others.

Despite Peter's dismal failures, Jesus was specifically calling him to hear the message of the resurrection as well as the offer to reconciliation and restoration. It would come. Jesus did meet Peter. Peter believed the message of the resurrection. Peter was reconciled with his Lord. Peter was restored to faithful service among the disciples.

Jesus tells each of us he's been raised to life eternal. This is the good news he wants to tell us all today, whether our name is Peter or something else. Jesus will meet us again at his altar to offer us his true body and blood. As we eat and drink in faith, reconciliation is enacted. Through faith we trust Jesus restores us to life and love and joy as we serve those around us.

Tell the disciples and tell Peter. The message of Jesus' glorious resurrection is for all people, but it's also for you and me. It's a personal and intimate message of love and peace for us which leads to reconciliation and restoration.

Maybe you can look at the person next to you. You might say their name and tell them Jesus died and rose again for them.

But that's not all. Just like the message of the resurrection wasn't meant to remain at the grave of Christ, today's message of Jesus' resurrection isn't meant to be trapped within these walls. Maybe we've all got others in mind who also need to hear this message. Let's not forget to tell them Jesus rose for them too!

So that the peace of God, which surpasses all human understanding, will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.