

Alarmed

Isaiah 25:6-9, Mark 16:1-8

Easter

The First Church of Christ in Hartford, Connecticut

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Some things are not supposed to be empty. Once a body has been buried, a grave or a tomb is not supposed to be empty. I mean, that's just creepy, right? Like a horror movie or *The Walking Dead*. If we went out into the Ancient Burying Ground and a great hole gaped where a coffin used to be, we'd be alarmed, right? Ghosts, zombies: these are the things that we imagine when confronted with an empty tomb.

The women who came to Jesus' tomb that morning were alarmed, Mark's gospel tells us. No kidding. Not only was Jesus not there, but a man who wasn't Jesus or one of the disciples or a guard or Joseph who owned the tomb sat there with a big smile on his face. Yeah. He almost had to physically stop them from running away in terror, which is what I would have been doing, too.

A tomb isn't supposed to be empty.

But it was.

Which is scary, because we can't believe that anything good could come of an empty tomb.

Funny, isn't it, how when we imagine the unknown or the future, we assume a bad news situation? The word that describes the kind of future stories which are so popular today is "dystopian." The opposite of "utopian," which means "perfect." From *Hunger Games* to *Get Out* to *Handmaid's Tale* and others more numerous to count in books and movies and TV shows, we imagine the unknown future to be terrible.

How sad that we can't imagine anything better might come from where we are right now. How small our imaginations. How alarming.

Don't be alarmed.

If Easter offers us nothing else, it should be that. Don't be alarmed. The cross, the symbol not only of pain and anguish but of the power of governments and empires, is now uninhabited and totally disempowered. Empty. The tomb, the symbol of death and hopelessness becomes the symbol of new life. Empty.

At first, the women just couldn't see it. They couldn't hear the words of the messenger God sent to them. As if the **feeling** of alarm became the **sound** of alarm, sirens, in their heads, they ran away in terror. They could not imagine what Jesus had actually already told them would happen. They could not see a future in which the empire would fall. They could not see a future in which God would respond to Jesus' death with love and forgiveness instead of destruction of Biblical proportions, if you will. In Mark, they do not see Jesus alive.

You may have been in a place like that, where you could not imagine anything good in the unknown future in your life. Maybe you're there now. Maybe you are too young to have suffered or struggled, but, unless you live an extraordinarily charmed life, you probably will. Sometimes in the midst of sadness or fear, we can't see a way out, even if it is right in front of us. In our alarm, we hide; we hunker down; we despair. "This can't end well," we say.

Like the women.

Now, Mark's gospel in its oldest form ends right there. Alarmed, silent women. That's the end of the Jesus story, Mark seems to say.

Some people say there's no humor in the Bible. Well, I think this is Mark saying to us "April Fool!"

Because if those women hadn't said something to someone, we would not be sitting here.

They did not stay silent. My best guess is that as they ran from the garden and down into the city streets, the Spirit of God began to work in them. By the time they got to the place the disciples were staying, Mary Magdalene stopped them, because her head had just about exploded with a new vision. The biggest OMG of history. Literally.

You know the New Testament was originally written in Greek, and in Greek, the Greek word that is translated here as "alarmed," can also be translated "amazed." Which is perfect, because what alarmed the women in this case was utterly amazing at the same time. And, finally, they got it. They got it! I imagine them running into that locked upper room and shouting at the disciples to put their shoes on and get their stuff because Jesus was waiting for them in Galilee and there was no time to lose; they had a long walk ahead of them. The cross was empty. The tomb was empty. The powers of this world disempowered by cosmic love. *Can't you see it?* They must have shouted at their confused friends.

Beloved, there is more to see than what we see. Dystopia abounds and seems to be covering earth like that shroud Isaiah described. A shroud is what you use to cover a dead body. But we are not dead, not by a long shot. Out of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School's halls of death came powerful life in the form of Emma Gonzalez and David Hogg, and the energizing of youth we saw in last week's March for Our Lives. Out of the blood-stained streets of Ferguson, Missouri came Black Lives Matter and a refusal to stay silent in the face of injustice there, and today in Sacramento. There is life all around us, and hope, and the power of truth and love.

As Christians, when we hunger for hope and love, we come to this table, where the empty cup is filled and we are filled, transformed into Christ's body, alive, now. The cross and the tomb

are empty. God has prepared a table for us in the presence of all that alarms us, and our cup overflows.

Don't be alarmed. The risen Christ is going into the next hour, the next day, the next year, the future, ahead of us and calls us to meet him there. Get your stuff together. It's a long walk. But Church, we walk together.

Christ is risen; Christ is risen, indeed! Alleluia!