**1 Corinthians 15:1-11 New International Version**

**15**Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. **2**By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

**3**For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Corinthians%2015%3A1-11&version=NIV#fen-NIV-28722a)]: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, **4**that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, **5**and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. **6**After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. **7**Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, **8**and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

**9**For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. **10**But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. **11**Whether, then, it is I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.

**Mark 16:1-8 NRSV**

**16** 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. **2**And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. **3**They had been saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?” **4**When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. **5**As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. **6**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. **7**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.”

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.﻿﻿ [[And all that had been commanded them they told briefly to those around Peter. And afterward Jesus himself sent out through them, from east to west, the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation.﻿﻿]]

“We Tell the Story of Hope”

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This is the way Jesus’ disciples have heard the story, passed down for a hundred and one generations. Sure, there are a variety of ways in which this story has been told, and even written in the Gospels. Printed in some copies of the Bible I have are two endings, even, both of which continue the story to include the women’s telling of Jesus’ resurrection to the disciples, as they were instructed. What if they hadn’t? What if, indeed, they were so amazed and scared by what the man at the tomb told them, that they had fled utterly away? I believe that Jesus’ love for us was greater than their fear, and that he would have continued on to Galilee as promised, nonetheless. Still, it is worth our considering. How has this story of hope been told—so often and so well, that we rest our faith and our trust on its truth?

Jesus of Nazareth, a criminal convicted in the Roman courts with the assent of the leaders of the Jewish temple, was crucified unto death. Without knowing that this story had begun centuries before, with promises from God handed down by the prophets, we might also believe that Jesus was quite a remarkable man, a miracle worker who dared to perform his miracles of healing on people whom others shunned, at times and in places that he shouldn’t be. Jesus was a rabble rouser, for sure, and he gathered around him common people, some of whose sins were well known. Jesus spoke of a coming Reign of God, in which the stories *he* told in parables become the reality in which we live. Those who are in need find life abundant under the reign of God. Those who practice peace are rewarded for their efforts, those who are ill are made well, and those who have suffered in seeking justice for all know that righteousness is rewarded. For many of us, these stories of redemption have taken a back seat to a thinner tale, proclaimed in louder voices. Quite often lately, people are told that if we but believe in Jesus as savior, we will get rich. Maybe you think this is a little funny, but too often I have heard the stories of people who say after winning the lotter that they “prayed for it to happen, just knowing that their lives will be different.”

I’m sure that may well be true. Lives can be changed with an influx of money, and those changes can be good *and* bad. The story we are telling around here is more than a little different, though. This morning, we pray that God might break into our lives with the same kind of life-changing strength with which she broke open the tomb. Christ is risen, folks, and this means that God has won a battle for us, and its reward doesn’t die with us. The story we’re telling is magnificent—and a little bit frightening, or at least it should be. What God has done for us through Jesus might well produce a bit of “shock and awe,” don’t you think? The story we are telling is that God has triumphed over the one thing we all fear most of all, death itself. No more do we have to fear that with our bodies’ decline and eventual ceasing to exist, nothing more remains. As Paul writes and I like often to remind you, “we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of humankind, who have no hope. For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.”

This kind of life changing belief began with that visit to the tomb on Easter morning. Grief stricken at the death of their friend and their Lord, hoping only that they might anoint his body with the spices they had purchased, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome arrive at the tomb, and they are told a very brief fact. Jesus, who was crucified, has been raised. Then, the young man tells them to repeat this story, this good news, to Jesus’ other followers.

Wouldn’t you think that tey would race back to their friends and shout from the highest mountains that Jesus Christ has done what he said!? God is bigger and stronger and more powerful than anything that this earth could muster. God’s love is bigger even than death!! But that isn’t the way the story spreads. Frederick Buechner says that he is surprised that *the* single most important part of the story is told in all four Gospels in what amounts to whispers. As he writes, “The part I mean, of course, is the part about the resurrection. The Jesus who was dead is not dead anymore. He has risen. He is not here.”

He's right you know: there are no trumpets at the tomb; no heavenly choir, and no proclamations are made in the village square. It is much later, in the book of Revelation that we hear about Jesus’ second coming, “with the armies of heaven arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, and his eyes, “like a flame of fire, and on his head many diadems.: As Buechner reminds us, “that is not the way the Gospels tell it. They are not trying to describe it as convincingly as they can. They are trying to describe it as *truthfully* as they can. It was the most extraordinary thing they believed had ever happened, and yet they tell it so quietly that you have to lean close to be sure what they are telling. They tell it as softly as a secret, as something so precious, and holy, and fragile, and unbelievable, and true, that to tell it any other way would be somehow to dishonor it. To proclaim the resurrection the way the do, you would have to say it in whisper: ‘Christ has risen.’ Like that.”

But we don’t have to, and I would say that we had better *not* keep this secret. The other stories we hear are *loud* in our ears. I stopped watching the evening news for years when I first became a mom, because I didn’t want my children to think that the strongest truth of life in this world is the violence and overall strife that is reported in mainstream media. Isn’t it wonderful that you can read online news that is *all* good news? Although it isn’t the only one, you can start with the Good News Network and go from there. Isn’t it also wonderful that on some mainstream news programs, *the last minute* is dedicated to something uplifting? To that single minute I say Hogwash! Look around at the faces of love in this place! Christ is risen! There is nothing in this life that cannot be overcome with love! We *will* continue to hear stories that horrify us, and we will continue to mourn with families who lose their loved ones, as we heard about this week in Gaza, and last week in the attack at the Russian concert hall that revives fears of the havoc caused by ISIS. And we *may* decided that the way to counter violence of that kind is to proclaim in just as loud a voice a story of equal or greater violence, but that is not what Jesus preached, and it is not the answer God provided. In the face of crucifixion, in the face of unjust killing, God provid3es resurrection. When the world tells the story of death, God asks for a story of life. If we have faith in Jesus of Nazareth, God incarnate who turned death into life, then *this* life is not the only one we get. Jesus Christ is not here, said the young man at the tomb. He has been raised!

And so, if God can raise a crucified man from the dead and if that man, our Lord, has ascended into heaven, why won’t we? We are telling the story of hope today, and it is hope that has carried on for a hundred generations of faithful Christians lifting their voices together, and quietly on their knees alone. Jesus saves. Jesus is risen. Jesus will come again in glory and bring us to his Father, where he as made a place for us. And in the meantime? All the little deaths we suffer *can* be resurrected as well. In case you wonder what that looks like, you can ask any number of people in this room. Healing happens, people: hearts mend, bones strengthen, blood begins to flow where it had been blocked, and love rises out of anger when forgiveness is offered. Resurrection happens. Christ is risen. Alleluia!