



Easter 2021
April 4, 2021: Easter Sunday
The Rev. Nick Morris-Kliment
Christ Episcopal Church, Needham, MA

Alleluia, Christ is Risen! The Lord is Risen indeed, Alleluia.

What a joy it is to shout those words in our Memorial Garden!

And yet, that is hardly the reaction of Mary, Mary Magdalene, and Salome when they rush to the tomb with spices to anoint the body of their crucified teacher and friend.

Rather than possessed by joy and vindication that Jesus' predictions about dying and rising had come true, they are seized by terror. In fact, the Greek word for "terror" has the same root from which comes the English word, "trauma." And instead of running right away to Galilee to find Jesus, like the mystery man instructs them, they tell no one.

And not only that, in the original Greek, the Gospel ends in a preposition: "for." Unlike the conclusions of Gospels of Matthew, Luke, and John, which feature encounters with the risen Jesus on mountain tops, gardens, beaches, highways, and homes, the Gospel of Mark ends with an incomplete sentence.

In fact, this ending bothered so many in the earliest Church that someone wrote what scholars now call the "shorter" and "longer" endings of the Gospel of Mark. These endings contain reassuring appearances of Jesus. You can find them in many editions of the Bible.

But most scholars believe these were later, add-ons.

There were those who just couldn't live with an incomplete sentence. Yet, it's because the decision is ours, which way to go; that's why it's an incomplete sentence—it's our decision which way to go. Some of you may have kids or grandkids who enjoyed the Choose Your Adventure series of children's books which were popular in the 1980s and 1990s. Periodically, at the bottom of the page, there would be a phrase that gave the reader a choice—for example: to follow Suzy and Jack into the cave, go to page 89; to race home and tell your friends that you found an empty cave, go to page 93, and so on.

God leaves the choice - of which ending, which adventure in the Gospel—to us.

When I was a kid, I loved Superman. I used to tie a towel around my neck, run down the hallway, and jump on my bed. I loved Batman—I had a Batman Matchbox car with a fire-breathing tail pipe, pellet launchers, and a buzz saw that came out of the front bumper. I especially loved the Japanese-made TV show called Ultraman, a superhero who defended the earth from catastrophic monsters. As an adult I have watched some of the Avengers movies and have enjoyed both Wonder Woman movies with my family.

All these superheroes had a superpower—strength, speed, the ability to fly, to be invisible.



Easter 2021

April 4, 2021: Easter Sunday

The Rev. Nick Morris-Kliment

Christ Episcopal Church, Needham, MA

But none of these superpowers is what we need from God. None of these superpowers brings us through the heart of despair or anxiety or sadness or discouragement.

The superpower we need is hope. Without hope, there is no future. Without hope there is no purpose. Without hope, there is no point at all.

If there was ever a Resurrection story about hope, it comes via Bryan Stephenson. Bryan Stephenson's story is about working with prisoners on death row. You may have read his memoir or seen the movie: Just Mercy. Stephenson declares, "I think hope is our superpower. Hope is the thing that gets you to stand up, when others say, "Sit down." It's the thing that gets you to speak, when others say, "Be quiet." ... If I've inherited anything from the generation of my black elders who came before me, I have inherited their wisdom about the necessity of hope."

<https://onbeing.org/programs/bryan-stevenson-love-is-the-motive/>

The Apostle Paul writes to the Church in Rome that "suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us." (Romans 5.3-5)

The New Testament Theologian N.T. Wright says that, "For the Christian, hope is not wishful thinking, or mere blind optimism. It is a mode of knowing, a mode within which new things are possible, options are not shut down, new creation can happen." (Surprised by Hope, p. 72)

As those women fled from the tomb, they stood before an unknown future, at the crossroads of hope. No wonder they were scared.

And yet ultimately, they *did* tell their story. They *did* go ahead to Galilee, where Jesus was waiting for them, just like he said. They are the reason we stand in the Sacred Story that is so much bigger than you and I. To quote a song from the *Prince of Egypt*, "Hope is frail—but it's hard to kill." And nothing could kill the hope of those women.

This hope is the story of Isaiah this morning. Even though his land has been conquered by the Assyrians, he proclaims that "God will make for all peoples a feast of rich food; God will swallow up death; God will wipe away the tears from all faces; This is our God. Let us rejoice in God's salvation." (Isaiah 25.6-9)

It's the story of the Psalmist: "Give thanks to the Lord who is Good. The Lord has triumphed, the Lord is exalted! The Lord is marvelous in our eyes." (Psalm 118)

It's the story of Paul, who reminds the Corinthians, and us, of the Good News which he, and we, received; the Good News in which we stand; through which we are being saved: that Christ died for our sins, that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day; that he appeared to Peter, the twelve, to



Easter 2021

April 4, 2021: Easter Sunday

The Rev. Nick Morris-Kliment

Christ Episcopal Church, Needham, MA

500 brothers and sisters, to James, all the apostles, and then, even to him, who had persecuted the church. (1 Corinthians 15.1-11)

Hope. Grounded in the Story that is grounded in hope.

So, here's the open-ended, future-oriented adventure that we choose in light of the Gospel:

The resurrection of Jesus Christ gives us the superpower of hope.

We don't know what the future looks like for our families, our communities, our parish, our country, in light of the pandemic, and the social, cultural, and political turmoil that is around us. But we know that our God is a God of hope. Jesus rises from the dead, not without scars, but with the superpower of hope to give us. And that hope leads us to where he is.

Alleluia, Christ is Risen! The Lord is Risen indeed. Alleluia.