

*When it was evening on that day,
the first day of the week.*

It's the same day.
Here we are a week later,
on the second Sunday of Easter,
but we're hearing the story of what happened later that Easter night.

That Easter morning,
they went to the tomb,
expecting to find their friend buried there,
instead the stone was rolled away
and Simon Peter and the other disciple looked in
and saw nothing but the linen wrappings lying there.

I skipped right over this line last week,
skipped right to Mary Magdalene
and how she saw Jesus,
and mistook him for the gardener.

I breezed right past this line:
then the disciples returned to their homes.
They showed up,
they saw the empty tomb,
they saw the grave clothes lying there,
and *then the disciples returned to their homes.*

And that's where we find them today.
Early in the morning they saw the empty tomb.
Now, *when it was evening on that day*
they are locked away in a room **for fear**.

What are they afraid of?

They've seen the empty tomb!

They know what happened.

Mary told them:

Mary magdalene went and announced to the disciples,

"I have seen the Lord."

So it seems that even when somebody tells us their story of resurrection,
we don't always get it.

And how could we?

How could they?

Things like this don't happen!

Jesus was the one with the power;

he was the one who had worked miracles,

but they saw him die.

They saw him laid in the tomb.

Why **wouldn't** they be afraid?

A clergy colleague of mine told me recently

that over the years,

no Easter service has ever felt quite adequate.

Which is true.

How could anything we do

be adequate to describe or even to celebrate

the experience those people had

on that first Easter morning?

Most of us love Easter,

and with good reason.

There's lot of people,

lots of energy:

it's the culmination of a whole lot of effort

by a whole lot of people.

But he had a point.

He said,

“You know, that’s just not the way it happened.

All the people;

all the energy wasn’t how it happened.

It wasn’t pastel or bright.

It was kind of dark,

and pretty confusing.”

And then he proceeded to tell me a story

about an Easter worship service

that a friend of his did one time.

Get ready for this.

Country church.

Not big,

but not small either.

About 100-150 people most Sundays.

It’s Easter

and they’ve got 250-300 people packed in there.

He’s preaching his sermon,

and about 2 minutes in,

the doors at the back of the church open.

And standing there

are two funeral directors.

In the middle of the pastor’s sermon,

they proceed to roll a casket down the aisle,

and get it into position,

just like it was a funeral.

Then...they reach down

and unlatch the thing

and to the horror of everyone there,

they OPEN it!

And up out of this casket
float a bunch of helium balloons,
and tied to those balloons is a sign that says,
“Happy Easter.”

Isn't that something?

People were furious.
Because he'd brought death into the room
on Easter Sunday.
Now, I'm not that theatrical.
I'm not ever going to do anything like that.
But that feeling those people in the church must have had,
as the funeral directors went to open the casket.
That's the feeling that those disciples must have had
when they looked into the empty tomb.

They expected to see their dead friend.
Instead they saw a sign that said,
“Happy Easter.”

*He is not here;
he has been raised!*

Easter is strange
and dark
and confusing
and probably a little fearful,
since nobody has a clue what's going on.

And that feeling,
that fear
is what sent those disciples back into that room.
That feeling is what had them locked away.

They locked the door,
afraid of the Romans or the temple authorities.

They locked the door
for fear of who was after them.

Turns out,
it was Jesus who was after them,
all along.

*When it was evening on that day,
the first day of the week,
and the doors of the house were locked,
Jesus came and stood among them and said,
“Peace be with you.”*

He came and found them,
not to berate them
or accuse them for their lack of faith.

He came and found them
to offer them the Peace of the Lord.

Isn't that something?

They didn't deserve that.
They didn't deserve to have Jesus come back
and offer them anything,
not even a good talking to,
much less the Peace of the Lord.

They expected him to be dead,
but even if they had believed all his talk about rising again,
they would surely have expected him to go and find new disciples.

After all they'd done.
After all they didn't do.
They denied him,
ran out on him,
and after seeing the empty tomb,
they "returned to their homes."

Clearly we do not get what we deserve,
at least not where Jesus is involved.

We call that grace.
Grace is this unearned,
often unasked for,
completely unexpected gift.

Grace is the way God works.
And Jesus is living proof.
Those disciples were living proof.
We are living proof.
Baptism is living proof
of the way God works.

We baptize people before they can ever deserve anything.
We'll baptize Olivia Wells Adams in just a few minutes,
and she hasn't earned a bit of it.

Do you remember your baptism?

You'll have a chance in just a minute.

You'll have a chance to remember.

I always try to invite the children to come forward.

They need to see the water;

they need to see it happen.

But I'll ask you to lean in too.

We can't all gather round the font.

There'd be no room for Olivia when I get ready to baptize her.

But lean your heart in toward the water

and try to remember how grace works.

Remember that we are promised,

through our baptism,

that God will stick by us

- forever

- no...matter...what.

Isn't that something?