

EASTER SUNDAY- 2006
“Go to Galilee”

Everything is as it should be. We know the story. Mary of Magdala, Mary the mother of James and Salome come to the tomb of Jesus with their spices. The sun is rising. It is the dawning of a new day, but they had no idea just how new it would be, but we know. And to the women’s surprise, the stone had been rolled back from the door of the tomb. We know that, too. As they enter they see a young man robed in white. They are utterly amazed - another familiar detail. So the man in white reassures them by revealing to them the extraordinary news that the crucified one they sought is not there because he has been raised. We knew he was going to say that. Then he tells the women, *“Go and tell the disciples and Peter, ‘He is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him as I told you.’”* And we knew that, too. No surprises for us. It’s good to hear the story again, though.

Not so fast! Don’t be so sure there are no surprises. For whatever the reason, those who put together our lectionary left off the next verses of Mark’s gospel. And those verses are critical to our story today. In fact, Mark intended to end his gospel with them. Scripture scholars tell us that the appearances of the risen Christ in Mark are later additions, inspired, but probably not written by Mark. And what were the last words that Mark wanted us to ponder? Get ready. *“And the women came out, ran away from the tomb because they were frightened out of their wits; and they said nothing to a soul, for they were afraid.”* (MK 16:8) The women didn’t say anything! They didn’t go tell Peter! They didn’t mention to a soul anything about going to Galilee to meet the risen Jesus! What in the world is Mark trying to do?

You know what I think? Mark’s gospel is the first example we have of interactive communications. He begins his gospel by telling us, the

reader, who Jesus is; the Son of God. And then proceeds to show us that the disciples never get it. They can't figure out who Jesus is, and they don't understand his message. So, when Mark writes about the women at the tomb, he has his readers in mind. The disciples during his ministry hesitated to follow Jesus, and the women at the tomb were too scared to act on what they had just learned. It's like Mark is asking us, the readers, "*Are you willing to act on what you know? Are you willing to put into practice your faith in the message of Jesus about the kingdom? Are you ready to accept the promises Jesus made to you about the possibilities open to you if you are willing to dream big? And are you willing to live your lives for the sake of others as the only way to realize these promises?*" Well, that's his surprise for us today. We weren't expecting that. But there is more.

When the man in white told the women to go tell Peter and the others that they were to meet the risen Jesus in Galilee, could he not have been telling them not just the place where he would be found, but the conditions in which he would be found? You see, Galilee was not regarded in very high esteem by the religious establishment of Jerusalem. It bordered gentile lands, and the Jews there had to be contaminated by their daily contact with pagans. Besides being "impure," they were by-in-large ignorant of the Law and the rules of the Temple. The fact that Jesus was born in Nazareth of Galilee was seen as a strike against him. "*What good can come out of Nazareth?*" During Peter's denial, he was called a Galilean. That was a put down. And in John's gospel, the Pharisees argue that Jesus couldn't be a prophet, because "*prophets do not come out of Galilee.*" Yet, that is where the disciples were to encounter their risen Lord, in a messy, sinful, impure, risky world.

We are instructed, as were the women, to go and meet Jesus in the "Galilees" of our world today. That is where God takes on human flesh

today, just as he took on flesh as a Galilean at birth. God is found among the poor and lowly of the world. As a theologian (Roberto Goizueta) from Boston College, says, *“It is precisely in the midst of this racial, cultural and religious impurity that the raised Christ, the now-glorified witness of God’s power and love, will be encountered.”* It is like these places have become the privileged locus of God’s self revelation today. If we want to recognize and crucified and risen Lord we must risk contamination. We will get our hands dirty, the purity of our faith may be threatened, and we may run the risk of stumbling ourselves. But we must touch the untouchable. And to our fear, Jesus says, *“Be not afraid ... there you will see me.”* Christ empowers us to overcome the fear of proclaiming the good news among unfriendly and reluctant people. But Christ also empowers us to overcome the fear of discovering the good news among the unfriendly and the impure.

Of course, we want to go to the temple, the church, to find Jesus, a place that is safe and pure and holy. Well, I hope that works. I certainly hope we don’t get in the way of anyone’s search for Jesus. But we come here primarily to be informed by God’s Word and transformed by the Eucharist so we can go out to the “Galilees” of our world today. For without drawing on the love of Jesus through his word and Sacrament, we won’t perform our mission to the world. I doubt some of us even know they have a mission to the world. It is when we go “out there” with self-giving love to a pregnant teen, a distraught widow, a despairing friend, a tired wife, a crying child, a hungry nobody, a reject of society, that we encounter the risen Lord today.

“Go and tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going before you to Galilee.’” Well, what are we waiting for?