

See the dawn breaking as the women come to the tomb. Sabbath is over and the work week has begun. Numb with grief they come to the tomb as women have come for centuries, bringing their spices to do the work of love for the one they love.

But look! the stone has been moved. Filled with uncertainty they peer into the darkness of death. In a flash it all happens – a figure saying “Do not be afraid. He is not here. He has been raised.” Then a message for Peter – Go to Galilee! He’ll meet you there!” Terrified, they run away as fast as they can – and they say nothing to anyone.

This is Mark’s telling of that first Easter morning –

We have little in common with the first witnesses to the resurrection. Today we come to the tomb expecting the stone to be rolled back, expecting it to be empty. We are no longer terrified by this other worldly – and patently impossible – resurrection of the dead. We are ready for it! It is all different for us – except for one thing – we too leave the empty tomb and say nothing to anyone.....

Because, we my friends, have a strong tendency to get stuck at the tomb – as if Jesus’s story and God’s plan have come to a conclusion here in the garden. We forget the message: Go to Galilee, I’ll meet you there.

Instead we followers of Jesus settle in at the empty tomb as if the resurrection work was accomplished, as if our task is to wait for Jesus to come by later and pick us up.

But the message is clear. He is not here folks. He’s up in Galilee, go there if you want to see him. These disciples were from the north, and they’re sent back home to the places and the people they know.... where they know the struggles and hopes and sorrows of their neighbors – there they will find Jesus.

The Jesus who is always 3 steps ahead of us is already there in all the familiar places. Go back, Jesus commands. Jesus is no longer in the temple and has been liberated from the tomb. Now he's out in the world and doing the work of resurrection.

Today, at the entrance to an empty tomb, he draws us into that same work. Jesus summons all his followers to continue this story of liberation by sending the disciples back to their people, to carry with them the news of a liberated life.

This is not some generic announcement to reassure you that in time all will be well – NO, this is about rolling back the stones from the tombs of real peoples' lives TODAY - the tombs that hold us captive. Resurrection life is God's gift to YOU, all the people you know by name, and all the people you have never met.

People like the leper whose healing raised him to new life: a return to his family and his community. Under his broken skin he had always been the same person, and now, restored to a fullness of life, he can begin to see God's beloved child at the center of each human being. Gone is his prison of prejudice and rejection.

Or the woman who was bent over, unable to stand straight for 18 years. She was raised up by Jesus, liberating her from the bondage of her body. She was raised up to take her rightful place again in the village, to experience the gift of new life and the knowledge that inside all bodies are people God loves.

Or the boy who was possessed by evil forces that continually threatened his life – call the demons whatever you will: rampant violence, addictions, mental illness, poverty....until Jesus raised him up for a new, resurrected life – liberated from his chains to find joy.

These folk encountered Jesus long before the tomb and for them, and it proved to be a resurrection experience – it transformed their lives and opened possibilities previously unimaginable. **But then resurrection is unimaginable until it happens to you.**

From an empty tomb Jesus is calling us into this life-giving work. He has already gone before us – preparing the way and drawing us into the streets, back alleys, kitchen tables and chance encounters. We are the front line workers of the Easter Good News.

This is the power of the resurrection: not to raise one man from a tomb – but to raise all of creation from the grip of death, from the grip of life lived in the chains of poverty and oppression, hunger and violence. By the power of the Holy Spirit we carry that same liberation message to each person we encounter. **As they encounter Jesus in you** they too can be raised up to new life starting right now.

Jesus was the first born of the dead. That is not the end of the story but the first step in an unfolding divine drama where healing and wholeness is extended to the whole world.

Don't get stuck at the tomb, my friends, but tomorrow – early in the morning on the first day of the week – go out into the world you know with the secure knowledge that Jesus has gone before you preparing the way.

Go out and be on the lookout **for the tombs that still need a stone rolled away.** Watch **for those in need of liberation-** not just the blind or lame, not just the addicted or arrogant, not just those mired in poverty, but every single one oppressed by our systems, lost or alone. Reach out and connect with them. Listen to their sorrow and pain, and through your words and deeds show

them the power of resurrection, give them a glimpse of hope in Jesus.

He is not here. He has been raised! And He goes before you into the world to be resurrection power for all whom God loves. This is our mission: to be in the resurrection businessin the name of Jesus the Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit and to the Glory of God. Alleluia!

Amen