

April 4, 2021 – 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 & Mark 16:1-8

As some of you know, this past Thursday morning I got sick. Very, very sick. I caught a nasty stomach virus. One that had me down for the count for a full 24 hours.

I completely missed Maundy Thursday service. I am so very grateful to Pastor McCalley from Trinity in Columbia for filling in for me. And even into Friday evening, I was still recuperating from fatigue and dehydration, although I was finally able to do the Good Friday service.

It wasn't until yesterday that I finally started to feel mostly normal. I slept in. I got out of bed feeling refreshed. I took a nice, relaxing shower. I got dressed. And then I went out into the house.

Where the TV was blaring. And my daughter was yelling something. And my wife was trying to say something to me. And the air fryer was roaring. And frying pan was splattering. And there was the smell of my daughter's breakfast and my wife's breakfast.

And for a moment, all I could do was stand there and try not to be overwhelmed by the sensory overload. For the past two days, I had laid in bed, staring at the back of my eyelids and drinking ice water while I waited for my stomach to heal. And now, all of a sudden, the noise and chaos of life were crashing down on me with a speed that left me literally dizzy.

Have you ever felt that? Had so many people talking to you at once that you didn't know who to listen to first? Had so many sounds and sights and smells bombarding your senses that you couldn't sort out what you should be hearing or seeing or smelling first? And for one moment, all you wanted to do was run back to into whatever quiet place you had come from and start over?

It seems to be a far more common phenomenon these days. Because it can happen just by turning on the news or hopping onto your social media of choice. This brave new world of information and communication that we live in is a two edged sword. It gives us a historic level of access to the knowledge and opinions of the entire planet. But it seems like they all come at us at once, don't they?

And it can be hard to sort it all out. Right now, one of the most difficult questions pressing our culture is, "Who do I trust? What do I trust? Is this information reliable? Should I listen to this news source? Should I believe this website? Can I trust the even images I see and the words I hear? How do I make sense of this world?"

These are not new questions. We heard Pontius Pilate asking, "What is truth," just two days ago. And when we look at the church of Corinth and all the issues they have to address, we see them dealing with these questions as well.

Because they are a very confused church. They have had a lot of very good teachers come and go: Paul, Peter, Apollos. They have lots of good teaching in their midst. But they also have a lot of sin. People engaged in sinful behavior. People teaching sinful things. And they live in a large, urban center of Greco-Roman culture that is chipping away at their faith.

And so Paul, after spending a number of chapters sorting through the chaos, chastising them, exhorting them, encouraging them, finally gets near the end and says, "Look guys, it's not that hard. Just remember what I preached to you. Just remember the Gospel. Just remember those things that were of first importance."

And what were those things of first importance to Paul? That Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures. He was buried. And he was raised on the third day. And he appeared to a whole bunch of people over the next 40 days. Peter and the twelve. James and the apostles. A total of 500 different disciples. And last of all, Paul himself.

This is what matters. This is our foundation. This is what everything else rests upon. This is the Gospel, in which we stand and by which we are saved. Jesus died. Jesus was buried. Jesus rose from the dead. And we have seen him. This we preach. This we believe.

And, ironically, it's a message that those women on Easter morning teach to us as well. It doesn't seem like it at first. It's such an odd reading, after all. Easter is thought of as a time to shout the resurrection from the top of our lungs. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

But, at first glance, it doesn't seem like those women did that at all. The angels proclaim to them, "He is risen! He is not here!" And the women respond by running and hiding and saying nothing, for trembling and astonishment had seized them. And they were afraid. The end.

Or not. Obviously it's not, because we're reading it. To end the story of the resurrection at this point is almost comical. Of course they told someone, eventually. And we have the accounts of them telling others in Matthew, Luke, and John. So even why make this statement?

Well, maybe because it shows us their gut reaction to the resurrection. Before they had seen the risen Christ. Before they had time to think about all the times they had heard him prophecy about his death and resurrection. Before they had a moment to talk to the other disciples and sort this all out.

Before any of that, their initial reaction to the news of the resurrection was fear. Fear and astonishment. Fear and trembling. They didn't know what to do.

They went to the tomb expecting to prepare a corpse for permanent burial. They went there wondering how they were going to roll back a stone designed to seal a body in a grave so that it could sit undisturbed and turn to dust. They went there with the effects of sin and the power of death as the only things on their minds. All of these worldly voices shouting at them until that's all they can hear.

And then the voice of this angel cuts through it all. "*He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him.*" And now, they have to decide: What is going to be of first importance to them? Is it going to be the world, telling them that sin cannot be beaten and death is permanent? Or is it going to be this voice from God's messenger, telling them sin has been beaten and death is not permanent? Not for Christ. And not for you.

It takes them a minute, but they get it right eventually. They do go to the disciples. They do see the risen Lord. And, like St Paul, they do spread this good news of first importance to all the world.

So if you come to church today unsure of what to do with the all the messages that the world throws at you, you're not alone. The devil's first temptation was to confuse us with lies and conflicting messages. Did God really say? That's not true. God's lying to you. I've got a better way. It's been his way of tempting us from the beginning.

But if you're here this morning, if you're listening to this scripture and hearing my words to you today, then it probably means you already know that something special happened at the tomb on Easter morning. That something of first importance happened, not just for your lives, but for the whole world.

Which makes everything else in this world of second importance. Or third. Or fourth. Or maybe of no importance at all. The theologian Jaroslav Pelikan once said, "If Christ has not been raised, nothing else matters. If Christ has been raised, nothing else matters."

So the world can yell at us and lie to us. It can try to blind us with temptations and lure us with false promises. It can do its best to incite fear or anger or pride or selfishness. As David says in Psalm 2, the nations can rage and the peoples plot in vain. All of the kings of the earth can set themselves against the Lord and his Christ.

And he who sits in heaven will just laugh. Because he has set his king on his holy hill. His Son has been crucified on a cross, buried in a grave, and yet now lives and reigns into eternity. What can all the world do in the face of that kind of power? What do all those distracting voices matter when the worst that they can do is kill you and the best that our God can do is raise us to eternal life?

So now, we gather here once again to celebrate our Lord's resurrection. And run back into this quiet place of the Lord's Sabbath and the Lord's Supper. And find the peace that comes from sins forgiven and God's Word proclaimed.

Not because we can stay here forever. But so that I, like St Paul before me, can remind you, my brothers and sisters, of the gospel we have always preached to you. A Gospel of first importance. A Gospel of Christ crucified and raised from the dead. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.