

Let's Run! Easter Sunday 2023
John 20:1-18

Slide: Run! Run! Run!

Growing up, I can remember that there was one cardinal rule about being at church: Don't run! No running in church. I was told this often: "stop running", "don't run", "Jesus can see you running!" And, as an adult, I can see why running could be a hazard. After all, there can be a lot of people around here. Running can cause falling.

During the Sunday school hour or Wednesday evening activities we hear: "let's not run! Don't run in church!" And, at our preschool, we may hear sometimes the all-important high voice: "Let's walk, not run in the church."

And, that might be because we are in a place where reverent things often happen. Plus, I think it's probably in our history to tell people not to run in church. Reverence is usually associated with quietness,

calm, pensive. When a person is praying, we aren't running, are we?

Slide: Silent Sanctuary

Even further, we often hear of a God in scripture who likes to rest and for us to rest. We rest by the still waters as Psalm 23 says. And, in First Kings, Elijah can only tell God is coming when he hears a still small voice. Psalm 46 says "Be still and know I am God." And, even further, we hear that as Christians, "We *walk* as yet by faith." We don't run, we walk.

Slide: Empty Tomb

But, on that Easter day, that very first Easter, the day of Resurrection, it seems that running was the thing to do. As Mary comes to the tomb and realizes that the tomb is empty, she doesn't walk. She runs. She runs to find Peter and the other disciple and then they run.

In fact, it's practically a relay race! You get a sense that they are trying to outrun each other, one disciple

getting to the tomb first before the other. Then, Mary comes behind them running.

Running, running, running:
Something has happened to cause them to run.

There are two reasons why people run. The first is to run because of fear. If your child falls off his bike and begins to cry, you run! If you are stuck in a house when it's burning down, you run. Sometimes, you run for your life.

But, we also run when we are overjoyed, like when you see your loved one after getting off that plane, or when you forget any necessary protocol when getting home after your long deployment, you run to see your spouse and child after those long nine months. So, when something is at stake in our lives, for better or for worse, we run. Some of us can run better than others. Even a jog is still a run. And, even the inward run with crutches or a walker, it's that light step, the hope, the joy, it's running.

This is why Mary ran, for she now had vital news to tell. Something was at stake for Mary. Remember, it was morning. In fact, we hear in the Gospel reading that it was still dark.

Slide: Flower at dark tomb

Mary comes to the tomb in darkness, but when John tells that story, he doesn't just mean literally that it is dark, although it is. He also means that is spiritually and psychologically dark. Mary is in darkness. This woman had placed all her hope and life in Jesus and now according to her, he was dead, dead forever.

And, in this same darkness, the disciples, they too, huddled away in a room in darkness. They didn't believe that Jesus would rise from the dead even though he said he would. They also lived with the shame of abandoning Jesus, the shame of hiding and the shame for their lack of friendship and following. Darkness it seems is everywhere for them.

But, here is the thing...in that darkness, Christ had already risen from the dead. He rose while it was still dark; for while it was still dark, the tomb was empty.

And, despite the darkness, Easter had come. The Resurrection was there and here. Easter was a reality even when the disciples did not know it yet, even when Mary didn't know it yet. It happened whether the disciples were ready for it or not and whether they believed it or not.

That's a reason to run. For that means, that in our darkest hour, at the times when the prognosis for cancer comes, when the job is lost, when the loved one dies, Christ has already raised from the dead. Jesus has already conquered death for us and won for us the life promised us, even and especially at that dark hour.

And, because Jesus has risen from the dead, there is hope for us. Hope that joy will come tomorrow even when we cry today. Hope

that there will be peace when we are at war. Hope that there will be love again if our heart has been broken. Hope to know that no matter what happens to us, God has already gone ahead and is there at the finish. Easter doesn't mean *less* the darker life gets. It means *more*, because in the darkness, Christ is already raised.

But, then, we hear that the three of them get to the tomb, and then the angel's announcement, and then Jesus shows up. Yet, he doesn't just show up like his old self. He isn't recognized by Mary because now something new has happened, something different - not resuscitation, but resurrection.

Jesus isn't just physically the same old body he once was, but a new one. He is a glorified resurrected body. Wow. That for us is a reason to run. For, if Christ is raised to a new body, than at the time Jesus comes again, we, too, will be raised to a new body. Not the same O, same O, but a new body, one that cannot die, one that cannot

decay, one that cannot know death. That's a reason to run.

But, again, it's not the only reason to run. For the Easter story is not only about Christ bringing us hope in our darkness; nor is it just about our being raised from death, but it is also personal. Up until now in scripture, Mary of Magdalene has been mentioned by her full Roman name, Mary of Magdala. But, now Jesus calls her "Mary". This is personal Easter, a personal savior. Easter is personal.

This personal expression reminds me of when I was in seminary. For there, my Greek professor Dr. Smith was never Robert. He was Dr. Smith. But the day I graduated and I said, "Thank you for all you have done, Dr. Smith," he said, "I'm no longer Dr. Smith to you. Now you call me Robert for we are friends."

This Easter story is personal. As in the Gospel reading says, Jesus called her Mary, Jesus calls me Christine, and he calls you (name some names in the congregation).

What happened on Easter is personal. It happened for you because Jesus calls you a friend.

Slide: St. John's Altar

So, I say, throw out all the rules for today. Let's run! Let's run with Mary and the disciples to the tomb and see our Lord up close and personal. Let's run and see the grave clothes tossed aside and the stone rolled away! Let's run until the entire world knows the living Lord is alive for Christ is raised from the dead and because of it, we will too.

On your mark, get set...GO!