

“Almost”  
 Mark 16:1-8  
 April 4, 2021  
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“I want to get up early one morning before sunrise.

Before the birds, even.

I want to throw cold water on my face - - and be at my work table

when the sky lightens and smoke begins to rise

from the chimneys of the other houses...

I hate to seem greedy - - I have so much to be thankful for already.

But I want to get up early - - one more morning - - at least.

And go to my place with some coffee and wait.

Just wait - - to see what’s going to happen.”

These lines by Raymond Carver describe a longing to experience the dawn.

The longing to be awake when the day is ALMOST about to begin.

A day just about to start.

Being awake just before dawn.

As I read these words - - I realized - - or should I say - - it dawned on me - - that:

It feels very different - - to be almost done...

...than it feels to be - - almost ready.

Almost - - looking forward - - is different - - from almost looking backward.

Almost over - - and almost here - - are not the same.

But they ARE - - - connected:

The night is almost over - - as the day dawns - - for example.

So - - the word “almost” - - seems to go together with - - the word “dawn”.

Dawn - - is that moment when the day is almost here.

A few weeks ago in our Sunday Bible study we were discussing memorable sunrises.

Many of us can remember a memorable sunrise.

And there is something about the dawn - - that is - - magnetic.

We all told our dawn stories as a way in to a conversation about resurrection.

Jesus is described as not only raised, but as the one who raises us up with him.

The sunrise has been connected to the resurrection for centuries.

That's why churches sometimes hold sunrise services on Easter Sunday.

But somehow, talking about the sunrise seems an easier starting point.

“What do you think about the resurrection”? is not a good discussion starter!

It's something you ease into gradually...

Fredrick Buechner has written about the gradual nature of the dawn in “The Sacred Journey”, and he describes it this way:

“God speaks to us through our lives... but often it takes many years and many further spellings out before we start to glimpse, or think we do, a little of what that meaning is. Even if then we glimpse it only dimly - - like the first trace of dawn - - on the rim of night - - - and even then it is a meaning that we cannot fix and be sure of once and for all...”

These words from Buechner are the starting point for an article from the Christian Century last summer called “Dawn” in which - - like our Bible study class at Plymouth Church, people wrote their experiences of “dawn” and sent them in.

Dawn - - can be a gradual experience.

And - - it is also - - an almost experience.

Well speaking of almost - - the vaccine roll out is ALMOST here.

We are ALMOST ready to move into whatever is next on this crazy Covid experience.

It has been a year since we stopped meeting in person.

Last Easter we were waiting for Easter.

And a year later - - we still are waiting.

BUT - - - the waiting seems to be - - - ALMOST over!

I wonder if our experience this past year is anything like that of the first Christians.

The early followers of Jesus waited for a while after the resurrection at the tomb.

Jesus had been killed.

Three days later - - at dawn - - women gathered at the tomb.

And those women leave the tomb - - confused and joyful - - about something!

And the early followers huddled in fear - - at first.

And then there were a few reported appearances of the risen Christ.

Something mysterious has just happened.

Something is ABOUT to happen.

Gradually - - it dawns on Jesus followers...

As I thought about this I realized that

right now the thing we are waiting for is the vaccine.

And the way vaccines work - - can help us think about Jesus and the resurrection.

Vaccines help us defeat a deadly virus.

Jesus helps us defeat - - death itself.

Vaccines help us do what our bodies are created to do naturally: develop antibodies.

They do this by introducing antigens.

Antigens are a part of the original virus that are the basis for the development of antibodies. / So the virus contains within itself the very building block of its own destruction: the antigen! / The vaccine just introduces the antigen part without the whole deadly virus.

The virus and the antigen and the antibody are linked.

And Jesus links the cross and the resurrection.

On the cross, Jesus himself points us to the resurrection. / Jesus does not avoid the cross.

Jesus does not avoid the tomb.

Rather, it is FROM the cross - - and FROM the tomb that resurrection happens!

The tomb - - like the virus - - contains within itself - - the building block of its own destruction. / Healing from tragedy and despair is built on our faith that Jesus rose, just like our physical healing is built on the antigen!

Our source of healing - - is found within the threat itself.

As the sun rose - - Jesus rose.

And we are raised with Jesus.

Mark's gospel says that the women went to the tomb at dawn.

Verse two is usually translated, "when the sun had risen".

But the word in Greek is "anatello".

That word can also be translated "dawn" as it is in Matthew chapter 4.

So another way to translate Mark would be: "when the sun had dawned".

Dawn.

Something new is ALMOST here.

It won't happen all at once.

But gradually like the dawning sun - - things will start to give way.

Think about your own faith, with this in mind.

Are you waiting on anything?

Where in your life - - does the word “almost” fit in?

Remember that faith leads gradually, but it leads FORWARD.

It feels very different - - to be almost done...

...than it feels to be - - almost ready.

Almost - - looking forward - - is different - - from almost looking backward.

Almost over - - and almost there - - are not the same.

When we look at life through the eyes of faith we lean forward.

We are almost there.

Even if some part of your life seems almost over - - it doesn't have to be a dead end.

Even the end of life - - is not a dead end.

In faith - - almost over becomes almost there.

There is always a next chapter...

And like the vaccine - - the resurrection is something that frankly I don't totally understand. / Not being medical - - I only sort of understand vaccines. / I did well in science classes. But mostly I TRUST - - this mysterious and amazing thing - - that the body produces antibodies - - stimulated either by an infection or a vaccine. / And then gradually we begin to heal...

I have studied the Bible more than science. / But I still only sort of understand the resurrection. / It is the great mystery of our faith.

But that doesn't mean that I doubt it.

Instead I TRUST it.

I don't totally understand how endings turn into new beginnings in faith.

But I trust that they do.

It was not JUST the sun that rose on Easter morning.

Jesus rose.

Probably actually in the dusk of early morning. / Just before the women arrived.

. From out of the tomb of death - - stepped the possibility of life without fear.

Mark tells us that the first thing the women felt was fear.

But that fear contained within it - - the building block of hope.

Fear and death and a virus - - all contain the way out within them.

Gradually - - like the dawn - - our lives can change.

Hang on - - we're almost there.