"Who Are You Going to Tell?"

A Sermon delivered by Rev. John Balicki

St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Wilton, Maine

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A pastor decided he wanted to play golf one Easter Sunday. So he called the associate pastor and told him he wasn't feeling well and couldn't preach. The associate promised to take his place in the pulpit and said they would pray for him.

So bright in early on Easter morning the pastor drives 80 miles to a golf course thinking he wouldn't run into anyone he knew. At that time an angel says to God, "Do you see that guy, Lord, playing hooky from preaching just to play golf. Are you going to let him get away with that?"

"No," says the Lord.

So the preacher swings his club and the ball goes three hundred yards and lands only a few inches from the hole.

"Wow." said the angel. "Lord, did you see what he just did? Why did you allow him to do that?"

The Lord replied, "Who's he going to tell?"

Who's he going to tell? A big part of accomplishing something is sharing the good news. Share the excitement – academic honors or passing a big test, advancement in our career, an award for service to our community, winning a cribbage tournament, cleaning up at Bingo – you just have to tell someone.

When the three women arrive at the tomb in the early morning, they see some amazing things – the stone of the tomb rolled back and a young man dressed in a white robe – who instructs them to tell the other disciples that Jesus has been raised from the dead.

Do they do that? No – they flee the tomb in terror and amazement and don't say anything to anyone. This is the good news of Easter? Why it's like the dog eating everything in your Easter basket before you get up in the morning, like your Easter lilies drooping hours after you buy them, like your Easter ham burning in the oven. Happy Easter, bah humbug.

In fact the original ending to Mark's gospel seemed like such a downer to early Christians that they felt compelled to fix it up. There is something called the "shorter ending" which is even in our book of the Gospels but I didn't read it:

And all that had been commanded them they told briefly to those around Peter. And afterward Jesus himself sent out through them, from east to west, the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation. Amen.

Like that a little better? Maybe you found a few chocolate eggs at the bottom of your basket that the dog hadn't licked.

Then there is what's called the "longer ending" which includes very brief descriptions of a final appearance of Jesus, an abbreviated version of the Great Commission, and Jesus' ascension and the gospel's advancement throughout the world. There is also a mention that signs would accompany believers such as casting out demons, tongues, handling venomous snakes and drinking poison - a very popular version in the snake handling churches. Why I believe your lilies are perking right up and your ham is coming out of the oven at a lovely internal temperature of 140 degrees.

Now most scripture scholars agree that what we heard today, known as the "abrupt ending" is likely to be original with Mark. Why did Mark end it that way? Was he not thinking of the perfect Hollywood ending? He does it to shift the burden of understanding to the reader. The fact of the empty tomb itself does not provide conclusive proof of the Resurrection. We are called to discover for ourselves that the Lord is risen by observing the effects of the Resurrection in our own lives.

Ohh, I think my chocolate bunny just melted. You mean this very first gospel ends with a pfffft of an ending and me having to do the work? I have to understand the resurrection myself and then tell it to others. How am I going to do that?

In the epistle today, we actually have the earliest written account of the resurrection. Paul tells us "of first importance" is the good news that Jesus died for our sins, was buried, and on the third day was raised from the dead. The truth of the Resurrection is attested by the eyewitness testimony of those to whom Jesus appeared —last of all to Paul himself, whose own calling derived from an experience of the Risen Lord. That's all nice you might say but who wants to listen to all that. I mean if more people wanted to hear that our churches would be packed. In fact I would wager there are more people in the Hannaford parking lot right now turning the air blue because they had no idea this was a "holiday" and are really upset they can't go in to buy their suitcase of Natty Light in order to make it through this fine "holiday".

We have our work cut out for us but maybe we don't have to stand on a street corner. Maybe like the women we can let that message sink in for a while. We know from the

complete witness of the four Gospels that the frightened silence of the women on Easter morning eventually gave way to proclamation. Their alarm subsided, their courage deepened, their trauma healed, and their amazement grew. They learned how to choose hope. They learned how to make the story their own, and as they did, the story blossomed and grew. But it changed them, and as they changed, the world around them changed, too.

The question then is has the story changed us? When I finally get done here, we're going to head down to the font. We renew the essential promises of our faith, our baptisms. For the moment let's briefly look at the last two but each Sunday of the Easter Season we'll spend time with one of them. Do you seek and serve Christ in all persons and try to love your neighbor as yourself? Maybe not all the time but does being part of Christian community encourage and enable you to do it more?

Do you strive for justice and peace among all people and respect the dignity of every human being? Every human being? Do we live in a world where many people's dignity is not respected? Is bullied, insulted, threatened, rejected? Does being part of Christian community help you to dig deeper and respect the dignity of the person at first glance you don't want to?

If so, maybe that's the good news to tell – how the good news has changed me. The next 50 days to Pentecost Sunday – we will hear further news about what it means to be raised, we will reflect on a different baptismal promise each Sunday to tell us how to live.

We're going to hear more astounding stories. Are you going to hear the story? There's going to be a lot of good news to tell. Who are you going to tell and how are you going to do it?