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First Christian Church
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What Will You Tell?

Mark 16:1-7 (The Message) When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so they could embalm him. Very early on Sunday morning, as the sun rose, they went to the tomb. They worried out loud to each other, "Who will roll back the stone from the tomb for us?" Then they looked up, saw that it had been rolled back - it was a huge stone - and walked right in. They saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed all in white. They were completely taken aback, astonished. He said, "Don't be afraid. I know you're looking for Jesus the Nazarene, the One they nailed on the cross. He's been raised up; he's here no longer. You can see for yourselves that the place is empty. Tell his disciples and Peter that he is going on ahead of you to Galilee. You'll see him there, exactly as he said."

A few years ago, National Geographic Magazine and others reported on a interesting phenomenon that has occurred in the last decade or so. It seems that there are certain birds which have learned to mimic the ubiquitous electronic ringing sounds of cell phones and have adjusted their mating calls to sound like the trilling of a cell phone. But these are talented birds, for they can mimic most anything and other reports say that they have also learned to replicate the annoying beeping that garbage trucks that do when they are backing up.¹ (Although I confess I find it difficult to understand why that would be an effective mating call.) But think about something: those birds could not have done that sort of mimicking of cell phones or backup warnings or the thousand other electronic noises that now surround our daily lives before about 1970. Because before 1970 not only were there no cell phones, **there were no electronic beep noises**. If you are of a certain age, you'll remember: No cell

¹ See, for example, www.time.com/time/health/article/0,8599,130210,00.html and www.cio.com/archive/050102/tl_bird_content.html

phone tones. No iPhones blaring whatever ringtone has struck their users' fancies that day. No annoying electronic dings and beeps from your computer when you do something to it that it doesn't like. No watches helpfully beeping every hour on the hour. No Tivos or DVD or Slingboxes beeping hostilely back at you as you try to program them until you give up and ask the nearest ten-year-old for help. No intrusively dinging text messages.

The noises of that last week of Jesus' earthly life in Jerusalem were not electronic, but they too were incessant and loud and ubiquitous. There was the noise of Palm Sunday, the crowds shouting their delight at Jesus. There were the no-doubt whispered and increasingly frustrated murmurings on Monday and Tuesday and Wednesday as those onlookers realized that Jesus was not, in fact, the new warrior king ready to lead the people in a revolution against Rome. There were the somber and poignant sounds made by the disciples around the table in that upper room when Jesus told them that one of them would betray Him. There were the sounds of Jesus' passionate pleadings in the garden both to God to let this cup pass and to the disciples who couldn't manage to stay awake with him. There were the angry sounds of soldiers come to arrest Jesus and the silent sound of a kiss by which he was betrayed. And then come the sounds, the horror-filled sounds, of Friday – Pilate's pleading with Jesus to save himself, the roar of the crowd in Pilate's courtyard demanding that Jesus die, the awful sound of leather lash on human flesh, the sounds of feet dragging a cross down a dusty road, nails driven into flesh and wood, Roman soldiers rolling dice to divvy up his clothes, the sounds of Jesus' words as he offered forgiveness to those who had put him here and to a thief on another cross at his side, and, finally, that simple,

harrowing, oh-so-sad last three words from his lips: It is finished.

The story of Easter as it is told by Mark is a curious rendering, compared to the other gospels. For the story ends only one verse after what we read this morning with this line: “So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.” And while if you look in your Bibles, you’ll see that the story continues for another eleven verses, virtually every scholar believes that Jesus’ post-resurrection appearances in Mark were actually added generations later by devout scribes who were very troubled by the thought of the story so abruptly ending with the disciples’ apparent fearful failure to tell what they had seen. But here’s the thing: I believe that Mark wrote that ending intentionally, and he juxtaposed the disciples’ initial fearful silence against the angel’s command to “Go and tell” for a reason.

And that reason is this: like those birds (you were wondering if I would come back to the birds) that have learned to mimic the sounds around them, the way Mark ends his gospel is **our** challenge to decide which sounds, which words, which actions **we** will mimic, which attitudes **we** will express, which actions from the story of Jesus will **we** resolve to make **our** actions? The angel’s command to the women at the tomb to “go and tell” is also their imperative to you and me, but the question remains: **what** shall we tell, what shall we tell? Well, like those birds which seem to have chosen to pick up and replicate the noisiest, most jarring, most annoying parts of the world around them, we too have the choice as to what we will copy, what we will go and tell. Do we mimic those crowds crying for Jesus’ death? Do we emulate those Roman soldiers whose gambling at the foot of the cross bespoke their attitude that the power of oppression is

stronger than the power of love? Do we cynically go and tell of an empty tomb and decide it shows not resurrection but some elaborate conspiracy theory to steal the body and put one over on the disciples, mimicking that story in our own day to believe the worst rather than to trust the best?

Evangelical writer Rachel Held Evans says this about Jesus' last hours

...it is difficult for me to wrap my mind around what it would have been like to be ridiculed so cruelly, to have my enemies throw my own words back into my face and taunt me for the things I hold most dear.... And yet amidst all the jeers, Jesus looked back at those who triumphantly gloated at his suffering and said, "Father, forgive them." Whatever you believe about Jesus, it's clear that humanity gave him the very worst it had to offer while he gave it the very best.²

The story of that final week of Jesus' earthly life is full of folks whom we can chose to model ourselves after, isn't it? Against the backdrop of the glorious reality of the empty tomb, the challenge that Mark indeed leaves us with is this: what shall **we** go and tell, how shall **we** go and live, whom shall **we** model ourselves after, the best or the worst?

- Do we model ourselves after, do we mimic, those around us who approach every relationship assuming the worst about the other's motives and words, instead of presuming the best?
- Do we model ourselves after, do we mimic, those in the story who believed that coercion and violence are the way to deal with the ambiguities and uncertainties and frustrations of life, or do we believe Jesus when he said to Peter "Put away your sword," put away your harshness, put away your

²<http://www.facebook.com/rachelheldevans.page/posts/10152965208844442>

suspicion, put away your hate and your fear and let love do its work?

- Do we model ourselves after, do we mimic, those disciples who in the face of the angel's command were silent instead, or do we speak out for the power of God's grace for each and all that shall not be defeated and thus calls on every Christian to stand up for justice for those who are oppressed, those who are marginalized, those who are "different"?
- Do we model ourselves after, do we mimic, those leaders who were fearful of upsetting the status quo and therefore were unwilling to speak the truth in love to those in power, or do we remind ourselves that Jesus told us that whatever we did in the face of the "least of these" we also thereby did it to Him?
- Do we model ourselves after, do we mimic, Peter's threefold denials of Jesus, or do we pray for the courage to speak up for those brothers and sisters in this land and abroad who have been maimed and hurt by understandings of God that are hateful and loveless?

My friends, I hope that you and I will leave this place today inspired and emboldened by the Good News of Easter: that God is never absent; that God can overcome even the worst with patient and powerful love; that your life and every life matters because you are loved by Jesus now and always – whatever your race, whatever your class, whatever your fears and your failings, whatever your orientation, your ethnicity, your politics. "Go and tell," the angel told the disciples and now tells us. I, for one, intend to choose to tell and to sing and to shout that indeed "Christ the Lord is risen today" – for that has made all the difference, all the difference indeed. Alleluia,

alleluia!