

“Alleluia Says It All”
Mark 16:1-8
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If there is a Sunday that the Gospel reading speaks for itself, it is Easter Sunday. Even if you don't know the rest of the story, that God raised someone from the dead is pretty amazing stuff, and tells you *almost* everything you need to know. There may be that little detail about what it all means theologically, but the jaw dropping nature of a resurrection is just about all one can handle in a day. The women who went seeking to anoint Jesus' body were kind of overwhelmed actually, filled with terror and amazement I think it said. I don't think they paused to ponder the implications. They just ran away as fast as they could!

In hindsight, they probably wished they had been at least a little more composed. Maybe they could have more fully appreciated the moment, and the gravity of what had taken place. Looking back, maybe they said, “You know what I should have said? I should have said Alleluia.” That's all there really was to say, right? Praise God. That's what the word alleluia means, literally: Praise God

Well, when a player on a sports team makes a mistake on the field, the other players on the team take it upon themselves to “pick up” the one who botched the play. And so the church has picked up the two Marys and Salome and made the word Alleluia *the* word for Easter Day, and Sunday in general. We've already sung it or said it a couple dozen times this morning and we'll sing it and say it a few

more before we leave. We've got the hindsight, and we've heard the story before, and so we don't need to be alarmed or terrified and we can just get on with the business of praising God for doing such an amazing thing as defeating death by raising a man from the dead, not just so he could die again later, but to life everlasting.

Alleluia is a Greekified spelling of the Hebrew word Hallelujah.

Interestingly, Hallelujah, as an expression of praise to God, was preserved, untranslated, by the Early Christians as the superlative expression of thanksgiving, joy, and triumph. That one, old word worked so well that they decided it would muck things up if they tried to translate it. There aren't many such words in the Bible, but the ones there are are some of the big ones. The word Sabbath, for instance, doesn't get translated as "weekly day of rest," but simply remains, powerfully, Sabbath. Alleluia, then, is a great untranslated, uninterpreted word for a day that needs no translation or interpretation. It has remained untranslated and uninterpreted, just as the joy of finding the empty tomb needs no translation, and just as the power of God needs no interpretation.

And what's more, there's still not much more to be said about the word Alleluia itself. There is almost no scholarly analysis of it, nor even much theological reflection. It's a heart word, a gut word, not a theological word. That's why even while you may not find much written *about* the word, you will definitely find the word written, most especially in a lot of music, perhaps most famously in

the Hallelujah Chorus from the second part of Handel's Messiah. There is a lot of power in speaking or singing that one simple word. Maybe you've been to a performance of Messiah and found the audience standing around you when the Hallelujah Chorus begins. The tradition is said to have originated with the first London performance of Messiah, which was attended by King George II. As the first notes of the triumphant Hallelujah Chorus rang out, the king was so moved that he rose to his feet and remained standing until the end of the chorus. Royal protocol has always dictated that when the monarch stands, everyone in the monarch's presence is also required to stand. And so, the entire audience and orchestra stood when the king stood during the performance, initiating a tradition that has lasted more than two centuries.

But there is another, even more powerful story related to the Hallelujah Chorus. It seems that Handel's assistant walked in to Handel's room after shouting to him for several minutes with no response and the assistant reportedly found Handel in tears, and when asked what was wrong, Handel held up the score to this movement and said, "I thought I saw the face of God." Alleluia. What more could anyone ask for than to see the face of God? In the resurrection story in Mark, the women don't stick around long enough to see Jesus face to face, but they must have later on. And when they did, let us hope that this time, the first word out of their mouths was Alleluia.

All of this is to say that Easter is the perfect day to simply say Alleluia, Praise God, and enjoy it. This is not a day to worry about tomorrow. It is not a day to do theological battle with people whose theories of the atonement are different than yours. It is not a day to lament what the culture around us has done to our most sacred high, holy day with all of its bunnies and eggs and chocolates. But it is a day to rejoice, to celebrate, to be amazed, to gather with friends, and brothers and sisters in Christ, the Christ who was raised from the dead on this day, and simply say together, over and over, Alleluia. Alleluia, Alleluia. Amen.