

Bar Harbor Congregational Church
Sermon by Rev. Rob Benson
March 27, 2016: Easter!

Many of us have come today to throw off the shackles of winter and take the renewal of spring and to seek Easter, the dawn of hope and the herald of rebirth. We found that our joy isn't complete without great company and great music, without that infusion of excitement that Easter offers. So to all who seek Easter's joy, welcome. May God bless you with finding what you seek. Many of us also bear heavy burdens. The weight of illness, loss, discouragement, and grief clings heavily to our hearts and spirits. We hope to hear again the message of Easter to roll away the stones that thwart our rising, to hear of the love more powerful than death, and a horizon brighter than our foggy perception. So to all whose hearts are heavy, welcome. May God's enduring love comfort and strengthen you with the great hope of Easter dawn.

Let us pray. Gracious God, Holy Architect of renewing love, lift our eyes from all that burdens us today. Help us to hear the good news of Easter joy, for all things are made new. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts amplify your words of grace for us all. Amen.

It is so easy to believe bad news. Every day we are bombarded with it: wars and rumors of wars, scandals and rumors of scandals, threats and rumors of threats, tweets and rumors of tweets. All of it is all too believable and so we do. We eat it up even when it isn't true.

But with good news on the other hand, our reactions are likely what the kids said, "Nah!" or "Whatever," or back in my day, "Nuh-uh!" We are all too eager to poke holes in stories of joy or redemption or accomplishment.

Pope Francis, washing the feet of Muslims—*media hound*, we'd say.

Nelson Mandela, who wrote, "Forgiveness liberates the soul and removes fear. That's why it's such a powerful weapon." *Ah, he's a dreamer negotiating from a position of weakness*, we'd say.

Azim Khamisa forgiving his son's murderer and working to secure his release from prison. *Deluded*, we'd say.

I'm not immune to this either. Diana Nyad. *The GPS waypoints don't add up! No independent observer on the boat! She should have known better.*

Perhaps it's an all too common, an all too human reaction, to readily believe the bad news and discount the good. But, come on! The Easter Scriptures are in a three-year cycle. One year, it's Matthew. The next, it's Mark. The next it's Luke. With John a much loved option every year. Over the years, we mush them together into one big Easter story like we do with the stories of Christmas. But if we do, we can miss some of the

details, like this year. Luke's account contains an interesting one. The women went first and alone to Jesus' tomb to anoint his body. They found it empty. When they went to tell the disciples, the disciples didn't believe them. *An idle tale*, they said.

Now, preceding today's passage, we read that the day of Jesus' crucifixion and burial was the day of preparation. The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee saw the tomb and how his body was laid. Then they returned home and prepared spices and ointments and because evening had come, and with it, the Sabbath, they rested.

Our story picks up here. The morning after the Sabbath the women go to the tomb bringing spices. And seeing the stone rolled away they're perplexed. Then they see that it's empty. They notice two men. Angels? It doesn't say. They are in Matthew. These two young men related the message, *He's not here*. As he said. We learn that it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary, the mother of James and other women with them who go and tell this to the disciples. But these words seemed to them an idle tale and they did not believe them.

Now to be honest, this kind of ticks me off. Why is it so easy to discount what they say? I get our regular human skepticism but these women were among Jesus' closest friends. Indeed they were the ones who remained faithful to him when the men were busy sleeping, denying, or betraying him. We have an untold number of women, three are named, experiencing an event beyond normal human comprehension and their testimony is dismissed. Was it jealousy? Why should *they* be the ones to discover this? Was it exhaustion and grief? *Oh, God, what now?* Was it social convention to assume that women's reports are idle tales? What was it?

One of the apostles, Peter, got up and went to see. He ran to the tomb, stooping and looking in. He saw the linen cloths by themselves. Then he went home, amazed at what had happened. Peter, who perhaps was eager to make up for his denial of Jesus not once but three times. Peter, who perhaps had begun to understand the crucial importance of bearing truthful witness to the mystery of Christ. Peter ran to the tomb and found it just as they said. For him, the women's words were no longer an idle tale but revelation, bearing the unexpected truth of God and the dazzling joy of Easter.

And so it comes to us. If Easter means anything today, it's not just a heartwarming tale but the truth of God's self-revelation and a metaphor for how we experience resurrection in our own lives. For those times when . . . seeking tombs, we find Angels. We too have tales to tell and words of unfathomable hope to share. And perhaps we too will be met with skepticism, dismissal, or worse. And yet maybe we'll find someone whose heart is quickened, whose hope is uncorked, who will want to go and taste and see for themselves. Perhaps it's not up to us to convince them of others, of God's gracious Easter presence beyond a shadow of a doubt, but to inspire them to get up and take a look for themselves.

Michael J. Brown, the writer said that "*The core of the Christian claim is that God does things that are grand, large, even revolutionary in the lives of human beings. When we*

proclaim the powerful experience of the resurrection, we put ourselves in a precarious situation. Our claim may be questioned but the deeds that flow from our claim provide the support for the truthfulness of what has happened in our lives.

The resurrection of Jesus is as perplexing and mysterious to us as it was to the women on that Sunday morning. Nevertheless they did not let uncertainty rule their lives. They share the brilliance of their experience with others, even those who did not believe them. But their testimony, though it did not convince the entire group, did influence one of Jesus' followers to go and examine the claim for himself."

It is my hope today that the joyous news of Easter will wash over us and renew us. That it will also inspire us to share and show the good news of God's redeeming love in our lives. Lord knows we could all use some good news. Amen.