

From the Bishop

*...and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid (Mark 16:8).*

Easter is not for the faint of heart.

The women had come to the tomb facing what they thought was a big problem – how they would move the stone away from the opening. It was the Sabbath and they had spices with which they intended to anoint the body. There seems to be no evidence they were afraid of the soldiers or of touching the dead body. They weren't even afraid when they found the stone rolled away. They went right in.

But when they heard the words from the young man about Jesus being raised from the dead, terror and amazement seized them. The man in the white robe spoke of, “**...Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here.**” When the women heard these words, they fled from the scene, overcome with a confusing mixture of terror and amazement.

The Gospel of Mark reminds us that Easter is more than a springtime ritual, a celebration of nature turning over, the greening of grass, or the birthing of bunnies. In fact Mark reminds us Easter is not for the faint of heart. Easter is about the triumphant love of God that turns the world upside down and reverses the deathward spiral of life. The story of Jesus that unfolds in the events of Holy Week stands the world on its head. Things we once thought were true for all time are suddenly upended. The resurrection of Jesus Christ rescues us from a self-centered life, tears down walls that divide, and breaks open a world enclosed by death.

And this is the dilemma, is it not? Easter is what we most want and what we most fear. Easter confirms in profound ways that God is love and God is trustworthy and God comes to rescue us from death. Easter is the very message we want to hear when we are eyeball to eyeball with death.

And yet, as we stand at the open tomb, what does this Easter message do to all our assumptions and viewpoints? To how we look upon ourselves and those with differing political viewpoints? To how we spend our money, our time, our energies? What does Easter mean for our deepest fears or our cherished hopes and dreams? How does Easter impact our relationships with family members or the neighbor down the street? What does this mean for congregational programs and our involvement in neighborhoods and communities?

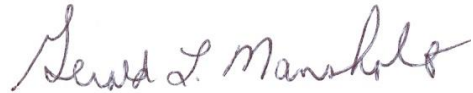
Easter is about the great reversal. The women went to the tomb expecting to do the usual, to anoint the body of Jesus. Then they heard the words, “**he has been raised...he is going ahead of you to Galilee...there you will see him.**”

I do not think less of the women because of their fear that Easter morning. If anything I find myself identifying with them when I ponder the meaning of the events leading up to Holy Week, the Passion of our Lord, and the astounding news of the Resurrection. The African American Spiritual asks, “Were you there when they crucified my Lord?” When I truly ponder the meaning of these events around the cross and the empty tomb, indeed I tremble, tremble, tremble, because of the profound magnitude of the message.

While the women left the tomb saying nothing to anyone, at some point they found their voice. The other gospels and the rest of the New Testament speak of their witness to the Easter story. Fear gave way to trust and a new found courage in witness and service emerged.

The same thing happens to us and it can happen in every congregation when people are stunned anew by the news of Easter. Lives are transformed. Hearts are renewed. Gifts are set free. Love abounds. This is the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ that enlivens the Church for the sake of the world.

A blessed Holy Week and Easter to all.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "David L. Mansholt". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial 'D'.