

The Park Road Pulpit

Sermons from Park Road Baptist Church

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Scurrying Around with Good News

John 20.1-18

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It's one of my least favorite lines, but I catch myself saying it all the time. "Hurry up! Let's go guys! Get a move on!" I'm usually snapping my fingers and fussing all at the same time. Trying to get out the door with everyone's shoes on their feet, book bags on their backs, reading records signed, breakfast eaten, teeth brushed – I'm exhausted before 7:30 in the morning. And that begins a typical day of scurrying. Sound familiar? We live in a fast-paced world where we are always hurrying to the next thing. We run around like chickens with our heads cut off, don't we? The way people run from one thing to another is about to wear folks out: from school to piano, from piano to baseball, from baseball to church – it's crazy. We live in a rat-race kind of world where the busiest, fastest paced people are the real success stories. Running around frantically from one thing to another will not make one successful. It will simply make one tired. Unless we are scurrying with Good News – which won't make us any less tired, but I contend, it will make us full.

What is behind your running around? Are you just trying to keep up? Is there real purpose and meaning to your scurrying? Or have you stopped running around all together – either in protest of the way things are or because you're too tired to keep up the pace? News networks have their reporters running all over the world to report the news, and seldom is any of the news good. Reporters are scurrying around with news on war and injustice and torture and violence and starvation because that is the news that sells. Juicy

gossip spreads like wildfire because we do have an insatiable desire to hear such. I wish that good news was that energizing. Last week on the Today Show, they ran a clip of a little 6 year old boy at school who looked up and saw his Dad at the door. Dressed in his army fatigues and just in from Iraq, the Dad strolled into the room as his little boy ran to him. I cried every time I saw the video clip. And Matt Lauer suggested that they just run that image over and over and over as the newscast that day. In the face of devastation and destruction, this was an image of life – Good News. That is Easter’s message, I think. Not that we bury our heads in the sand about the realities and hardships of this world, but that we do have a response to the realities and hardships. Our response is wrapped up in Easter cloths.

What is behind all of your running around? Is there real purpose and meaning to your scurrying? It certainly was for Mary. I was struck in John’s telling of resurrection how much running around there was. Mary comes to the tomb to grieve and when things weren’t quite right there she took off running to get Peter and John. Of her report that the tomb was empty, those two took off running to see for themselves, and I’m sure that Mary was running right behind them, probably a little winded since she had already made one mad dash. John outruns Peter arriving at the tomb first, but then after winning that race he can’t bring himself to go inside. When they discover the tomb empty, those two go home, but I can imagine that they aren’t running this time. I imagine a slow, steady pace of grief and confusion. But Mary stays – where else is there to go? So she sits and cries, until she experiences the presence of Jesus still with her. And with that Good News I picture her taking off in an all-out sprint to proclaim the Good News: “*I have seen the Lord!*”

We are always running around – scurrying if you will – but is it with the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ? Have you scurried lately with the message: I have seen the Lord! There are clues all around that let us know that we are not alone – the presence of the living Christ is alive and well, but rarely will you find him on the evening news. I'm not sure the risen Christ cares too much about how much money the presidential candidates have raised so far, or who America's next Idol is, or who the Trump is firing this week. These are the stories that have reporters scurrying around to report. The risen Christ is among the last and the least, the poor and the oppressed. He's hanging out in cemeteries among those who grieve, and he's sitting with those who know despair. That's Easter's message.

Consider this past week and all the running around that you did - how much of it was for reasons beyond yourself? How much of your scurrying was filled with meaning and life-giving purpose? How much of your scurrying is done on behalf of the Good News? I find preaching on Easter to be one of the most difficult Sundays to preach. That may seem odd, but there seems to be such high expectations and everything needs to be just so. And how can this story be told again, but in a new way – a way that this time will make a difference. The truth is – nothing has changed about the story. It's the same one we heard last year and the year before that and the year before that. It is the central piece of our Christian faith – a first account of Jesus' followers continuing to experience his presence even after death. And more than 2000 years later we sit in a sanctuary that smells to high heaven of Easter lilies, the trumpet plays, the choir sings, many people get a little more dressed up to hear the Story, but it's all probably done with no real expectations that anything will be different tomorrow because of it. Ah, therein lies our

mistake. To think that we could come here, not just on this Easter morning, but on any morning that the Story is being told and not be changed discredits the love and mercy of God.

Roberta Bondi is a church historian by trade. She is one who has battled depression on and off for most of her life. “Bondi describes a particular moment in which her understanding went through a deep transformation. She was alone in her study, in a moment of despair. She told herself, ‘I absolutely give up.’ She surrendered to her state of mind. ‘There in my familiar chair, on that green April afternoon, the light of my life went out . . . How long I sat there in that state, I have no idea. Perhaps it was a long time that passed; perhaps it was simply a moment. I only know that, all of a sudden and without any warning, I woke up. I heard my own voice repeating in my mind the words from the Roman Catholic Eucharistic prayers for Easter, ‘The joy of the Resurrection renews the whole world.’ Every cell of my body heard them and for the first time I knew that these words were absolutely true. ‘The joy of the Resurrection.’ I said to myself, and my heart filled up with a joy so fierce that it spilled out and ran through the whole of my body and flickered around me like a flame. In my red chair I laughed out loud for pleasure . . . Of course! There was, indeed, something I had missed about Christianity and now all of a sudden I could see what it was. It was the Resurrection! How could I have been a church historian and a person of prayer who loved God and still not know that the most fundamental Christian reality is not the suffering of the cross but the life it brings.’” (The Living Pulpit, Volume 7, No. 1, Jan-March 1998, book review of *Memories of God* by Roberta Bondi, by Ginger Grab, page 36)

This is what I hope will be different tomorrow because we gathered here today on this Easter Sunday: I hope the very first time you start to say “Hurry up,” I hope that the minute you begin to feel yourself starting to trot, I hope that the moment you start to run or the second you start to scurry that you will consider whether the purpose is of Good News quality or not. And if you find that your scurrying tomorrow – or this afternoon – is merely a part of the cultural rat-race, that you will let it go and save your running around for something that is Good News.

“As Mary made her way down the dark road to the tomb, memories of better days in Galilee tried to pierce through the darkness. Ah, Galilee. How far away that must have seemed from this wretched place. Jesus was popular then. Hope had taken root in her heart. No one ever knew exactly what to expect of Jesus, but clearly they all had higher hopes for him than that he would be crucified as a traitor to Rome and a blasphemer to the Jews . . . When Mary arrived at the tomb, she was startled to discover that it was empty . . . Then John tells us that for a while there was a lot of running back and forth to the tomb. This is still what we disciples of Jesus do when he is missing. We run around a lot . . . The question that Easter asks of us is not ‘Do we believe in the doctrine of the resurrection?’ . . . What the Gospels ask is not ‘Do you believe?’ but ‘Have you encountered a risen Christ?’ We get the feeling that Mary was never the same after Easter. Neither is anyone who has learned that what matters is not that we be confident in our hold of Jesus, but confident in his hold of us.” (The Christian Century, “Savior at Large,” March 13, 2002, Craig Barnes)

I doubt that one of my least favorite litanies will be banished from my mouth: “Hurry up! Let’s go guys! Get a move on!” I just hope that when I say it from now on it

will be in response to the fact *that I have seen the Lord!* For that is always worth scurrying about. May it be so.