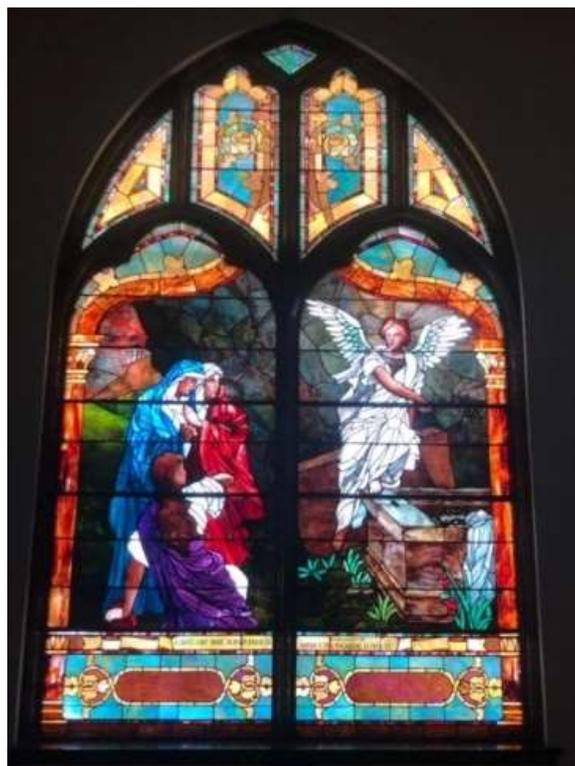


# Easter 2021

*As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you." So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them...* Mark 16.5-8a

One of the privileges of being the pastor here at First UMC of Reynoldsville is that every Sunday morning I have the perfect view of the Reed Window pictured here, which portrays the resurrection scene as described in the Gospel according to Mark. This means that I, perhaps more than anyone else present for worship on any given Sunday morning, have in my field of vision the very core of our faith: that Jesus, who was crucified, dead, and buried, arose from the dead. It is this truth of which we sing, in which we hope, by which we pray, and with which we live every day as we strive to follow the teachings of Jesus and walk the way Jesus walked.



Mark tells us that following their encounter with the angel and the news that they had heard, the women “went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.” I have to confess that the more I concentrate on the image, the less I understand the women’s reaction! Yes, they had come to the tomb, likely with their minds clouded by grief, expecting to do one last lovingly kind ritual act of service for Jesus. Yes, they had a similar reaction to every other biblical character’s encounter with an angel: they were afraid. And yes, despite all that Jesus had been telling them on the entire journey to Jerusalem, no one among any of the disciples expected a resurrection, so the encounter would have been an overwhelming experience for the women, just as it would have been for Peter, James, or John had they encountered the angel. Yes, this is all true; and yet... And yet, the women who had been most closely allied with Jesus, the women who had welcomed him into their home, provided meals and respite, these same women respond, not in obedience to the command of the angel to “go, tell his disciples and Peter...”, but in the silence of fear: “they said nothing to anyone.”

Perhaps I have simply spent too many years watching Candy Reign portray Mary on Easter morning: Mary with her tears and her fears, but also Mary as transformed by the encounter. Mary, as portrayed by Candy, who joyfully begins to tell everyone, the children, the congregation, etc. of the reality of Jesus’ resurrection: “He is ALIVE!” Whatever the reason, I cannot help but wonder, why didn’t the women tell what they had seen, let alone what they had been told? Why couldn’t they get beyond the “terror and amazement” of that moment?

And then, as I ponder these questions it finally begins to dawn on me: perhaps it is because the idea of resurrection and of life beyond death is so difficult to believe, even in the best of times. Indeed, I must confess that in truth, that has been my greatest struggle in the years since my father’s death. For a very long time, I could not picture my father after his death as anything BUT dead. No image could come to me beyond his headstone at the National Cemetery of the Alleghenies. No image beyond the well-manicured lawn surrounding his headstone. I’d been a United Methodist preacher for more than 35 years at the time of my father’s death; I’d been a committed Christian as long as I could remember, even to the earliest memories of my childhood. I was so certain of the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ for so long...and yet...and yet...it has only been over the last couple of years that I have been able to envision my father as “part of that great cloud of witness” surrounding us and the throne of Christ and that ability to see beyond the grave did not come easily. But, finally, on most good days, it has come to me.

Now when I stand on a Sunday morning before that stained glass portrayal of those women trapped in their terror and amazement, I am able to see myself, along with everyone I have ever known who has been just as “stuck” in their grief as was I. But I also see so much more than that now, too. I see the grace of gentle and patient God who has provided an angel, a messenger, to declare the Truth of Easter with all of us. The same God who loved us, who loved the whole world enough to dare to become one of us and One-with-us and even to dare to die for us, that we might also die with him; that we might die to all of our misplaced confidences and certainties, to enter so fully into the terrifyingly desolate and desperate presence and awareness of death’s reality that it silences both our spiritual arrogance and ignorance, that like our forebearer of faith Jacob, we must wrestle with the terror and the amazement until they finally grant us their blessing. And finally, I see that the tomb really is EMPTY, and that emptiness can mean only one thing: Resurrection. Life. Light beyond the Darkness. Joy beyond the Grief. Consolation beyond the Desolation.

As John the Evangelist declared so boldly: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.... All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it.”

By His Grace,

*Pastor Tom Carr*