

This is Not Normal
Mark 16:1-8
2021 Easter Sunrise Service
Port Williams United Baptist Church
Dr. Don Flowers, Jr.

You know this is not normal.

Nothing about this is normal

Standing out on a dyke, early in the morning, waiting for a sunrise that may or may not be seen.

This is not normal.

It isn't what normal people do!

But then, in this year, on this day? Who is to say what is normal anymore!

Why not meet outdoors on the dyke before most people have even had breakfast? Why not get up and put on your winter clothes in a time when so much of the world is basking in spring flowers and balmy days? Why not gather with a bunch of people socially distanced, when so much of what we are told is to stay away! Far far away!

Why not?

What is normal anymore?

Definitely not today!

The women knew what was normal. They knew the rituals, the things that you do when someone has died. You wash the body, you wrap it for burial, you anoint it with spices to delay, to mask the decay of the body.

They knew what to do, only the ritual had been disrupted because of the sabbath, especially the sabbath coming on the heels of Passover. So their ritual, their grief, their normal was delayed.

We have known that in the past year haven't we. We have know what it is like to have our rituals disrupted. How many funerals have been postponed "until a time the family might gather." How many weddings, celebrations, the very markers of life have been delayed until things get back to normal.

Life was back to normal that morning, and so the women, the women—the keepers of normal in our world, the ones who make sure that the holidays are celebrated, the cakes are baked, the presents are purchased, the cards are sent, the meals are prepared—the women got up, prepared the spices and headed to the graveyard.

They were carrying all the spices, but so much more. They were carrying hearts full of grief. How could such a thing happen to Jesus, the one in whom they had placed so much hope, so much love. He had seen them. And they had placed so much hope in him. They really believed he was the Promised One, the Messiah.

They were bringing more than their share of anger! He had been so good! So very good! What had he done to deserve this? Feed the hungry, heal the sick, proclaim the coming of God's kingdom? It was probably that last one, because any kingdom, even one of love and grace, especially one of love and grace threatened the status quo.

They came with their spices, their emotions, but also so many questions. Actually, just one BIG one. What were they going to do about that stone? There was a HUGE stone at the mouth of the tomb—to keep out thieves, animals. But also to keep in the smell! It had to be moved for them to do what they had to do, but how would they ever do it?

They were carrying all these thoughts and emotions as they make their way to the garden that morning.

What have you carried here this morning? Are there griefs that you are carrying? Griefs about people lost in the past year; about opportunities that didn't happen, celebrations that have been delayed; trips that were postponed until, well who knows when, or if?

Are there emotions that you haul everywhere you go? Anger about what could have/should have been? Hostility about that slight, that hurt that weighs on you daily and even more haunts you at night? Despair over the so-muchness of this year, this life?

And what are the thoughts that you bring with you? Not only the details about lunch today, but even why you are standing out here? And that project that is waiting when you get back to work, that assignment that won't let you rest, that thing that weighs so much on your mind that you wonder how it will ever get moved, let alone finished.

Then you know what these women were carrying that morning. But can you imagine their thought when they turned the corner and saw that young man just sitting there. Dressed in white, not something you would wear in that dusty dirty climate, looking as if he had not a care in the world!

"Good morning," he said. "Don't be worried or afraid. You are looking for Jesus? He's not here! He has been raised. But he wants you to go and tell his disciples that he will see them in Galilee!"

Full Stop!

There is so much about that which doesn't make any sense. Jesus isn't here? He has been raised from the dead and is on his way to Galilee? And we are supposed to go tell the disciples?

And that part about not being afraid?

Do you see how not normal this is?

And did you see their reaction? Literally, what the verse says is: *"And they went out quickly, and fled from the sepulchre; for they trembled and were amazed: neither said they any thing to any one; for they were afraid."*

They were afraid, because this is not normal! This is not what they had expected! Everything about this day was turned upside down and even as wonderful as this news might be, it was not normal! The very foundation of their lives was shaken.

That was the title of a small collection of sermons by the great 20th century theologian Paul Tillich. In an Easter sermon he begins by recalling a scene from the Nuremberg War Crime trials. Tillich writes:

*A witness appeared who had lived for a time in a grave in a Jewish graveyard in Wilna, Poland. It was the only place he—and many others- could live, when in hiding after they had escaped the gas chamber. During this time he wrote poetry, and one of the poems was a description of a birth. In a grave nearby a young woman gave birth to a boy. The eighty year old gravedigger, wrapped in a linen shroud, assisted. When the newborn child uttered his first cry, the old man prayed: 'Great God, has thou finally sent the Messiah to us? For who else than the Messiah can be born in a grave?'*¹

Babies aren't born in a grave! That is not normal. And Messisahs aren't born in graves. In fact, graves mark the end, the finale. That is what is normal. That is what we expect. Anything other than that disrupts our normal and that terrifies us.

That is why the women fled from the tomb that morning in fear and said nothing to anyone. Their normal was disrupted. It wasn't suppose to be this way! Because if this could happen, then what might the future hold?

What might the future, our future hold if death isn't the final word, our great fear? Could we fully live into the love, the promise, the calling of God?

Oh, there is nothing normal about this! You got up this morning, bundled up and came to stand on the side of a dyke...because that's what we do on Easter morning; because it is a part of our ritual; because this year, of all years, we need a reminder that because of Jesus' resurrection life isn't normal anymore.

Thanks be to God.

¹ Paul Tillich. *The Shaking of the Foundations*. (Charles Scribner's Sons:New York, 1948.) 165.