

*In the name of God, who makes us, loves us, and keeps us. Amen*

What do we do now? There's that famous question, the one that people ask at times of sudden and unexpected death and disaster. Perhaps you have heard yourself blurt it out when the rug has been pulled out from underneath you, when the world around you suddenly seems unrecognizable, when with disbelief you think you ought to be able to turn the clock back a few minutes and have the shock just go away and all things return to normal. I have heard myself desperately ask that question myself: What do we do now?? As Jesus is arrested, crucified, and buried away, I suppose the disciples and others, devastated and in shock, themselves automatically asked that question. And perhaps you have heard me share with you my humble advice, that when that question is on your lips or in your mind, you intentionally, bravely, alter it to ask: What's the faithful thing to do now? That appears, by the way, what the women in all the gospel narratives were able to do. While the men, the eleven closest friends of Jesus, fled and hid for fear, some of the women turned their thoughts to doing the faithful thing that morning. They went to care for his body, lovingly armed with spices and such, as some of the narratives tell, to do a faithful thing. They went despite their deep sorrow and despite the knowledge that a great stone barrier would stand between them and their intentions. God bless them, they just had to do something, even if it was just to show up and be present. They had to do the faithful thing.

And their love for him was rewarded by earthquake and angel, by vision and evidence, by surprise and reassurance, by mystery and miracle. While others were yet wringing their hands, chanting desperately 'what do we do now?', their wise choice had offered them the gift of greetings from the Lord. And an assignment. They were to convey a message to the others, too, that they should likewise be faithful enough to follow a simple command. Tell the brothers to go to Galilee, where Jesus would meet them. Back home to Galilee. Back to where this mission began. Back to basics. For the mission isn't over just yet. This, you notice in the gospel text, was not just a helpful suggestion; it was an imperative, a command to do a faithful thing. Now, many of you know that I like to think of myself not as the 'answer man' but rather the 'question guy'. I often distrust the quick and easy answers, preferring to keep asking and let the questions themselves guide me onward. I am frequently skeptical of those things which are promoted as absolute doctrine, conventional wisdom, and so-called given truths. But I do think that when we sincerely ask God what is the best and most faithful thing to do, God's Spirit will reveal and offer us a good way forward, that God will create a victorious pathway (even rolling away obstructing stones and barriers), and that Christ will point a finger (a mysteriously human and divine finger) and tell us to go ahead. To go ahead to Galilee. To leave the paralyzing anxiety behind. To get back to basics. To continue the mission.

So, the eleven disciples have hidden themselves away this weekend in fear. It's not frightful enough that the authorities are likely searching for them, but now the women bring them news that Jesus has risen from the dead, and they remember his prophesy. What will Jesus have to say to them now, after they all fled and abandon him at his most vulnerable moment? Sure, it's a wonderful thing if he has indeed been raised from the dead, but what will he feel about them now? With what anger might

he confront them now? Is his survival of the cross and tomb a cause for rejoicing, or a threat of retribution? Well, we'll hear more about that in next week's reading from the Gospel of John, but meanwhile, as they recall the Master's promise to live again after three days confinement among the dead, what else might they be remembering? This new command to go ahead to Galilee might remind them of all the other commands Jesus has given during his ministry, and how they swore in their hearts to do as he insisted, even when the instructions seemed difficult and obscure. Remember when he insisted that they love their enemies? Now that was an odd and unexpected command, wasn't it?! It might have even sounded good in the abstract, but here and now, hiding from the authorities who probably would like to crucify them, too, would Jesus still insist that they love their enemies? Yeah, he probably would!

And then there were all the other commandments he told them, so fundamental and important that he wouldn't tolerate any pushback or disagreement: Love God, and Love your neighbor as yourself! Take my yoke upon you! Turn the other cheek! Repent and return to the Lord! Let your light shine! Remember those? Dear friends, many of us have heard the familiar commands of Christ since we were children, and as Jesus rises in glory, as we rejoice to receive him once again, we are again called to hear the imperatives he is promoting...and to do our faithful best to live them. Ask, seek, and knock, he commands, Care for those in distress, Love one another, Abide in me, Let the little children come to me, Let not your hearts be troubled, Bear much fruit, Feed my sheep, Heal the sick, and judge not. Many of you are experienced deckhands on this great ark of salvation, and are familiar with the dozens of orders which come down from the bridge: Lay up treasures in heaven, be wise as serpents and gentle as doves, lend without expecting to be repaid, honor your parents, be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect, watch and pray, come and see. Do you recall all these commands? Beware of false prophets, go the second mile, do good to them who hate you, gather up the fragments that nothing be lost, consider the lilies of the field, fear not, rejoice in all circumstances and be exceeding glad.

This Easter Day, we are reminded that our captain is indestructible. This Easter Day we are recommissioned as his sailors, each with our various unique callings and tasks. This Easter Day we renew our pledge to serve the mission for which we have trained and drilled, that God's Kingdom should arise within and about us. With Christ's leadership we expertly scan the horizon for pirates, watch the skies, keep the decks clean and our powder dry, alert and ready for each new challenge and each new order. We enlist and train new deckhands, encouraging others to join our crew, that this glorious mission may not wane with the aging and passing of our particular generation. But chiefly are we bound to hear the captain's orders and act on his imperatives, not with fear and foreboding, but with trust and faith. Our disciple, our discipleship, is not to randomly, fearfully, furiously, row for shore, but to set aside our paddles and follow his orders to raise the sails, skillfully tie the knots, and catch the wind. For it is God's own breath, God's own Spirit which sets the course, chooses the best commands, trains our fingers to be efficient, and sweeps us forward on this Easter mission. Ring out the ship's bell; Alleluia!