

Resurrection of Our Lord (RCL/B): "Love Letters To and Fro"

Mark 16:1-8

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Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

NASA is sending a love letter to extra-terrestrials. Delivering the message will be the Europa Clipper spaceship, not the U.S. Postal Service, UPS, FedEx or Amazon. The message will head on its way this coming October. Instead of being in transit a couple days or even a couple weeks, the mail should arrive in 6 years: 2030 is the experts' best guess.

The address on the NASA package isn't real specific; anywhere on Europa, a moon circling the planet Jupiter, will do. There isn't a particular addressee either; it's kind of the luck of the draw who receives and who opens the mail, if anyone. The love letter from Earth will be engraved on a 7 by 11" plaque made of a metal called tantalum. On the plaque will be inscribed a poem, "In Praise of Mystery: A Poem for Europa," written by U.S. Poet Laureate Ada Limón. There will also be audio recordings of the word "water" spoken in 103 different languages. Why that word among all the possible words in the world? Photos of Europa suggest that under its icy surface lays more water than exists in all of Earth's oceans. The presence of water, and therefore of oxygen (H₂O), is why astrobiologists identify Europa as a possible oasis of **life**. This is why NASA is sending this love letter Europa's way, saying, "**We're** here. Are **you** out there? Is **anyone** out there?"

Back in the 1970's NASA sent another CARE package into outer space on the Pioneer spacecraft. It included what look like gold LP's, engraved with images of the male and female human body, and a map using radiowaves emitted by pulsars to assist extra-terrestrials in finding Earth. It's an exercise in hope. The implicit message is, "We come in peace."

Messages have come in the **other** direction, too. The most **important** message planet Earth has received from the Universe didn't arrive in a spacecraft and wasn't mistaken for a meteor. It

came in the form of a Child born in Bethlehem. The Child **did** arrive with a message from the Great Beyond, a message He held close to His heart and shared when He became an adult:

God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish, but may have everlasting life. (John 3:16)

St. John says of this Child, the Son whom God sent, that He was no stranger to this world:

³All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴in him was life, and the life was the light of all people... ¹²... to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God.... ¹⁴And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

Heavenly signs accompanied His birth and His death. An extraordinary star shone in the sky when He was born, leading magi, **astronomers** from afar, to follow the light beyond their known world and to adore Him. When He died, a solar eclipse occurred. (A couple nights ago we sang into the darkness, "Were you there when the sun refused to shine?") His birth amazed and His death terrified. His resurrection amazed, but it terrified first, as we heard in today's Gospel.

The women who went to the tomb to anoint the Christ (interesting, since *Christ means* the Anointed One!) were shocked to find "**no** body," **and** to find **somebody** they certainly hadn't expected, "a young man, dressed in a white robe" (Mark 16:5), sitting there, a supernatural presence illuminating a space usually dark with death and awash in grief. St. Mark makes it really clear it's all too much for Mary and Mary and Salome! Despite being instructed to go and tell the guys and the rest of the gals that Jesus had been raised and would meet them all in Galilee:

They went out, and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid. (Mark 16:8)

Period. People who know these things tell us this was the legit ending of the first written Gospel according to Mark. 'Way to leave us hanging! No actual bumping into the risen Lord Himself, no surprise visit as He passes through the closed doors of the Upper Room, no disciples of

Emmaus recognizing Him in the breaking of the bread, no breakfast on the beach with the risen Lord grilling fresh-caught fish and asking Peter 3 times, “Do you love me?” Just a trinity of women running away as fast as they can from a nearly empty tomb and a mysterious extra-terrestrial visitor.

This seems strange, but it’s also familiar space to us, the time between promise and fulfillment. We believe we’ll meet the Lord in-person up ahead, but for now we have somebody else’s word for it, and sometimes absence overwhelm spresence. It’s been said that the stone which seemed so immovable in the women’s conversation and imagination on their dawn trek to the tomb, symbolizes every “gravestone” in our lives, literal and figurative: the actual death of loved ones that cuts our hearts to the quick, the smaller deaths, yet still brutal endings of relationships, dreams, careers, physical or mental health. “Who will roll away the stone?” The stone that crushes my heart and makes it hard to breathe and renders me emotionally immobile. “Who will roll the stone away....?”

“When the women looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back.” (Mark 16:4)

Sometimes we just don’t realize there’s Someone Else doing the heavy lifting for us. Faith is trust that despite all signs to the contrary, “... all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.” [Thank you, Julian of Norwich.] Faith is trust that the One who said, “And on the third day I will be raised again,” was right. Faith is trust that the One who promised, “I am the Resurrection and the Life” meant it; He spoke God’s own truth.

When God sent this living Love Letter to earth, this CARE package called Christ, it wasn’t a spiritual shot in the dark, a scientific search to **find** life. It was **sending** Life with a capital L. When we fear that there’s an immovable stone on our heart or in our way, He has given us the means to lift it, to access the Holy Spirit’s power: Word & Sacrament. Easter is a great gift.

Because we're the Church and not Hallmark, Easter isn't just 1 day, it's 50. And every Sunday throughout the year is a "little Easter," a day of Resurrection celebration. You're invited!

Remember the word spoken in 103 languages, headed to Europa this coming fall? "Water." In the waters of Baptism we have come to share in Christ's death and resurrection. Every day God gives us grace to die to sin and rise to new life, to be raised up from the little deaths we experience to share abundant life in Christ. Everlasting life has already begun for us in Holy Baptism.

The director of the Planetary Science Division at NASA in Washington has said of the love letter headed to unknown recipients on or underneath Europa, "The plate combines the best humanity has to offer across the universe: science, technology, education, art, and math."¹ Our Father in Heaven surely has sent **us** the best that **Heaven** has to offer:

For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish, but may have everlasting life. (John 3:16)

We are Easter people and alleluia is our song! Amen

¹[www.goodnewsnetwork/org](http://www.goodnewsnetwork.org).

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