

EASTER CAME LATE FOR CINDY THIS YEAR
Mark 16:1-8; Cynthia Krenz Funeral; September 9, 2020

“Is Easter going to be early or late this year?” That’s not a question that most of you worry about too much. It is a question that pastors and church musicians pay close attention to – as do church secretaries, which Cindy was for many years. Most people don’t know how the date of Easter is chosen, though you probably realize that it moves around on the calendar each year. You know that you will have plenty of warning to get ready to celebrate Easter, with Ash Wednesday and Lent some six weeks before. Even our national media, which care little or nothing for Easter – other than to question and raise doubts as to whether Jesus ever rose from the dead – can’t ignore Easter. But Easter does not “just happen” for pastors, church musicians, and church secretaries; they plan and get ready for it.

Beyond Maundy Thursday and Good Friday bulletins needing to be prepared, printed, and folded, church secretaries usually print a bunch more Easter bulletins. Easter is typically the best attended Sunday every year, but not this year. This past Easter on April 12th we were ordered to shelter at home. Only the pastors and a few church musicians were allowed to be here to present the service for Livestreaming. Cindy was already sick at home. She missed being in church for Easter this year, which is something that might never have happened before in her lifetime.

But what Cindy wasn’t able to attend this year, the Easter service, she wanted celebrated at her funeral. She did not want her life celebrated at this Service, but the life of her Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, who died on the cross and rose from the dead to give us something to celebrate today. This is a good reminder to all of us that, if a funeral, or as it is popularly called these days, “a celebration of life,” is not first and foremost a celebration of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the celebration is misguided. All the good that Cindy did in her life did not and could not save her from this day. **All her righteous acts were as filthy rags** (Is. 64:6), except that **the blood of Jesus cleansed her from all unrighteousness and forgave all her sin** (1Jn 1). Because of the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ we have something to celebrate today.

When the women went to the tomb of Jesus on the first Easter, the cares and concerns of this life were heavy on them. They were there St. Mark tells us to finish preparing Jesus' dead body for permanent burial. His body should have been washed after death before being wrapped in the linen shroud with spices, but His death happened too soon before the Jewish Sabbath, the Day of Rest, so the work could not be done in time. They had seen the large rock rolled to cover His tomb, a rock too large for them to roll back to get to His body. They were grieving the death of the One they loved, and they still had work to, but they weren't sure how they could get it done.

God gave Cindy's family the opportunity to care for her in life while she still suffered, and in death after her suffering was over. They were there for her, with the support of the hospice staff, to do what she could no longer do for herself, something she resisted right up to her death. There were personal care tasks that she refused to acknowledge she needed help with. She was restless and unwilling to admit in the last days and hours that this last enemy, death, could get the best of her. She knew death would come at the end of her suffering, but she wanted us to gather today to celebrate Easter with her. When there is nothing more we can do for ourselves and others, we are able to celebrate Easter because Jesus Christ has done everything we cannot do for ourselves, or others: defeat sin and death and rise to live forever.

Unlike the women at the first Easter, we have a dead body with us and we will go to the cemetery to lay it to rest in the ground. A headstone will mark the place and dirt will be placed over her casket to seal her grave. We can find at the cemetery the remains of many people who have died. If you have time to walk around the cemetery you might see the graves of a number of family and friends whose remains lie there waiting for the Day they will be raised. And if Christ's return is delayed must longer, there is a good possibility that all of us here today will be joining them in our graves. People who are afraid of death don't like to go to the cemetery because it reminds them of what is coming for them.

Many people are afraid to even say the words "death" and "died" and prefer words like "passed away" as if that softens the blow or makes today hurt less. Jesus wasn't afraid to speak the word "death." In fact,

He came right out told His disciples that He would suffer many things, be killed and die, and then rise on the third day, something we just confessed in the Apostles' Creed.

Because the first Easter fell on a Sunday, Christians chose Sunday as the primary day to gather to hear God's Word and receive the Sacrament of His body and blood. And when being a Christian was against the law and punishable by death, the tombs of Christians who had died under persecution started being used as altars for worship services. Roman Christians used tunnels under the city called catacombs to bury their dead and would sneak there in the dead of night to worship their Lord and Savior Jesus who was persecuted for us and for our salvation, who died and was buried like us, but rose from the dead with the promise to raise us from the dead.

When Christians were able to establish their own cemeteries, they continued the practice of holding services there, especially late on the eve of Easter. Especially among the tombs of martyrs for Christ, they began their Easter celebration while waiting in faith for the living Jesus Christ to come and raise them.

Cindy did not die a martyr in the sense that someone killed her just for being a Christian. The word "martyr" originally had the basic sense of bearing witness about something, but not necessarily to die because of that witness. But because so many Christians shed their blood for confessing their faith in Jesus the word "martyr" gained the added meaning of one dying for that witness.

But Cindy did die witnessing to her faith in Jesus Christ as her Lord and Savior. Part of her witness was planning her funeral service to be an Easter celebration. Easter came late for her this year, September. She wanted this Service to be a witness to her faith in Jesus as the One she trusted in life and in death. Her witness today is that, just as Jesus rose from the dead, she will rise from the dead on the Day that Jesus returns in glory. Her body, which will be laid to rest in the cemetery – the word "cemetery" comes from the Greek word for "sleep" or "rest," as in, our bodies sleep in the tomb until Christ wakens us to live forever – Cindy's will rise to live forever. As we say on Easter, and as we will say at the cemetery when we lay her body rest: Alleluia, Christ is risen! **He is risen indeed, Alleluia.** Amen.