

**SERMON: "GOING ON AHEAD!"**

**TEXTS: NEW TESTAMENT  
NEW TESTAMENT**

**ACTS 10:34-43  
MARK 16:1-8**

**March 31, 2024  
Easter Sunday**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

For those of you who may be visiting, I am Dave, one of the pastors here  
Let me tell you just a little bit about myself. I am a sinner, in need of God's grace.  
I'll give you an example. I drive too fast, have the speeding tickets to prove it.  
I am also the oldest of three boys.

My dad was a tough, no nonsense kind of man. Think Clint Eastwood.  
My youngest brother, twelve years younger, likes to tell this story.  
He and his girlfriend were on the highway when he too got a ticket.

After the trooper left him with that piece of paper, my brother went on up the road  
until the next exit where he pulled off looking for a store where he could use  
the phone (this was long before cell phones – back in the day). His girlfriend  
asked him. "What are you doing?" He answered, "I'm calling my dad  
to tell him that I just got a ticket." This left her a bit puzzled.

My brother could tell what she was thinking, "You're doing what?" so he spoke up  
to explain, "I'm calling my dad ... because my big brother Dave did not!"

So, on behalf of all the first-born children who learned the hard way  
by way of trial and error (and more errors) a word to the younger siblings  
"Yes, you are welcome!" Your older siblings went on ahead of you,  
and in so doing, you whippersnappers may have learned a thing or two

That's what I'd like to talk about this Easter morning ... about 'going on ahead.'  
We pick up the Easter story as told by Mark as the women enter the empty tomb

**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."**

## NOT HERE

Unlike the other gospels, in Mark, there is no encounter with the risen Jesus. One commentator, Aubrey West, explains what Mark does not emphasize. And what he does emphasize. She focuses on verse 7, “he is going ahead of you.”

*Each of the other Gospels shares at least two pieces of evidence as proof that Jesus has risen from the dead: witnesses to the empty tomb and appearances of the risen Christ to multiple followers. In Mark, the tomb is empty (apart from the messenger), but nobody gets to see Jesus or touch the nail holes in his hands. There is no great commission (Matthew), no recounting of the Hebrew Scriptures or a meal shared with travelers to Emmaus (Luke), and no intimate conversation with Mary in the garden nor sudden arrival of the risen Christ behind locked doors (John). Instead, there is a promise: “He is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.”*

**“He is going on ahead of you.”** What might that mean?

Mark has two points he wants to make with this, the shortest of the stories of Jesus’ resurrection – where Jesus is AND where he is not

Mark starts with where Jesus is not. Not in the tomb. Not anymore.

He isn’t there. He is nowhere near that now empty tomb

That’s what I tried to capture in picking the image for the bulletin cover

Search empty tomb and you can find lots of images, some looking out, some looking in, some with the cloth. I wanted one that showed Jesus leaving, that showed Jesus on his way out of the there

We’ve heard the Easter story before, many times. We expect the tomb to be empty.

But for the women who went to the tomb expecting a body (and the disciples who stayed behind, afraid and confused), not finding a body would be a shock to the system ... overwhelming, hard to wrap your head around.

This discovery would be “turn your upside down” big, real big!

My prayer is that we too see how “turn the world upside down” this empty tomb is

This changes how we see that world. Jesus is not where the Romans put him, not where his followers put him. Not where we put him. He is not there!

He has gone on ahead ... Jesus is on the loose

I’ve been to the Holy Lands 3 times. Been to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher twice. It is the cathedral in the Old City of Jerusalem that is home to the traditional sites of where it is believed Jesus was crucified and where the empty tomb is

They are that close. It is a holy place ... and a busy place

Lots of tourists, pilgrims who want to see the empty tomb

## GONE ON AHEAD

The priests who usher the crowds through there, can on occasion be a bit grumpy  
You spend your day encouraging tourists to keep moving. It can happen  
Our tour guide told us about the time she got in trouble with one of those priests

She had a person in her group who had a hard time fitting through the tight space  
The person needed extra time and consideration. The priest was not being  
that considerate or that patient. The guide lost her patience with the impatient priest  
and said something a bit too harsh. She said, "Stop rushing him  
People come here to see an empty tomb. Don't make me fill it ... with you."

I know. She should not have said something so threatening  
The priest called the police. The officer who responded saw the tour guide,  
picked up his pace upon seeing her and gave her a big hug. They were friends.  
That hug helped priest and tour guide both realize their own impatience  
They each admitted their wrong and that was that

My takeaway from her telling that story is to wonder ... Are we trying to fill the tomb?  
Put Jesus in his place ... even if it is ornate, even if it is beloved?  
Even if it is special, even if it is spiritual, even if it is sacred?  
The tomb is empty because Jesus is not there, gone ... gone on ahead  
The tomb is still empty ... and it is going to stay that way

That is where Jesus is not. There is no putting him in his place.  
So where is he ... he has gone on ahead. And I don't mean just to Galilee!  
Matthew also includes this message from the angel at the tomb  
about Jesus going on ahead to Galilee. But it is John whose language  
of going on ahead that really speaks to the power of the Easter story.

It is a passage I have used at almost every funeral I have ever done  
It is from John, chapter 14, when Jesus speaks to his disciples  
when he knows and they know his days are numbered.

**Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me.  
In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so,  
would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go  
and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself,  
so that where I am, there you may be also.**

Jesus going on ahead includes him making way for us to follow, preparing a place  
For you and me, for us and them. He spent his lifetime saying, "follow me."  
That is what he has done by leaving the tomb. Leaving it empty.  
Again leading the way that we might follow

## SUMMARY

That means following Jesus out of whatever tomb may hold our bodies,  
whatever urn may hold our ashes. He lived and died and lives again  
So too then shall we. Jesus' resurrection makes for more and more  
and more resurrections, our resurrections

Easter is not a once upon a time story. Not just about back then  
It is about the future much more so than it is about the past.  
Think about it this way. Jesus not only left the tomb, he left it behind  
He's now gone on ahead. And not only that ... he has prepared a place  
for you and me, for us and them, in our Father's house.

With his resurrection, Jesus overcame death. He did this for us  
He lived and died and lives again for us. He cleared a path,  
out of the grave and beyond, for us. He has gone on ahead so that we might follow  
He lives so that we might live, like the song suggests

*Because He lives, I can face tomorrow  
Because He lives all fear is gone  
Because I know He holds the future  
And life is worth the living ... Just because He lives*

I so like the fact that Jesus is gone on ahead.  
It gives me courage to keep going whatever may lie ahead  
And I mean whatever, whether it be the problems associated with going too fast  
or with going too slow or with getting stuck in our frustrations or our fears

Now I know full well my opening illustration falls far short in trying to describe  
what it means that Jesus has gone on ahead. Far short  
But that's not going to stop me from using one other incomplete illustration  
This one about driving as well. Let's talk church vans.

Have you heard they have now come out with a van designed specifically  
for churches? It is a 15 passenger van with all the bells (handbells) and whistles.  
One accelerator and fifteen brake pedals. It even has three different drive settings  
You know like D1, D2 and D3 ... but for reverse ... R1, R2 and R3

Yes, I am just kidding. No such van exists.  
Because if we really wanted a theologically accurate church van  
It would not need all those reverse gears, wouldn't need all those brakes  
It would be designed for following the One who still is ...  
on the loose ... and going on ahead ... and preparing a place.