

Easter Sunday April 4, 2021

Mark 16:1-8

This has to be the oddest of the Easter readings from our gospels. The women fleeing from the tomb in the grip of terror and amazement in equal measures. Saying nothing to anyone about what they had seen and heard because they were afraid. And this is where Mark's gospel originally ends. It is such an ambiguous and unsatisfying end that later editors added the verses that follow seeking something more palatable.

Why did the author of Mark do this? Why did he write the resurrection of Jesus this way?

Maybe because he knew that a story of resurrection couldn't be neat and tidy. That anything he wrote would never answer everyone's questions to their satisfaction. How did it happen? What was the biology of the whole thing? Where was Jesus between Friday and Sunday morning?

Maybe he wrote it this way because anything beyond the basic facts wasn't important to him and his audience. This is the earliest Gospel in scripture, probably written about a generation after these events took place. Unlike the other gospels, Mark has no birth narrative of any kind. The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ the Son of God starts at his baptism by John.

Apparently, Jesus' birth just wasn't that important to those early believers. In Mark, Jesus enters the scene from Galilee as a fully grown man. Perhaps it is fitting that the end of the beginning of the good news has Jesus returning to the land of Galilee.

Mostly, I think the author of Mark ended his telling of the good news of Jesus Christ this way because it had to end this way. Throughout the gospel, Jesus has been telling people to keep quiet about the miracles and exorcisms he has been doing. Yet, they proclaim it freely. "Come look at the amazing thing I have seen!" Now, when they are finally told to speak- they don't! This ending had to influence the audience listening to this Gospel. Produce in them the same effect that happens to us when we yell at the screen during a movie, "Don't go in there! Are you nuts!" This ending pulls those of us hearing it into the story, it invites us to take over for the women and tell the news. "Jesus, who was crucified has been raised. He is no longer in the tomb!"

This ending also calls us to do exactly what Jesus has done with all the other disciples. To accept the invitation of Jesus, "Follow me".

The young man tells Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James that Jesus has gone ahead of the disciples to Galilee, that they and the other disciples will meet him there- just as he

promised. They are to follow him once more. Follow him back into the world- back to the place where he ate with sinners and tax collectors, back to the place where he healed lepers and epileptics and those who were bleeding out their life. Back to the place where he fed the hungry with bread and with the Word. Where he taught them what the Reign of God looks like.

When you come right down to it, the resurrection isn't an ending folks, but an invitation from Jesus to follow him. Follow him into the world and proclaim the Good News of God in Jesus Christ. That nothing, not even death, can keep God's love from reaching us. Nothing, not even death, can prevent us from receiving it.

Jesus goes ahead of us to our own Galilees, our own hometowns, and the people we know best. We may run away with fear and trembling and not say anything. Be silent. And still Jesus goes ahead of us.

And we have hope because we know the truth that our existence proves- someone did speak. The women were not forever silent- despite their terror and amazement. Because we are here- gathered outside City Hall on a beautiful April morning, because someone proclaimed to us Jesus is no longer in the tomb he has been raised—and that we believe- no matter how ambiguous and mysterious it might be- we believe that this good news is true.

We gather this Easter morning also like those early disciples wondering what lies before us- both as individuals but also as a community of faith. We may be seized with fear and trembling of our own. Concern over what will happen to our congregation. What if people don't come back? What if they go somewhere else that is opening in person worship quicker than we are? Or it may be about how we will recover from this pandemic, or how to manage long Covid symptoms, what jobs will look like in the future, what all of this has meant for our children.

I'll be honest, I don't know the answer to those questions- other than to say there is still work to be done.

What I do know is this.

The divine life-giving power that raised Jesus from the dead is the same divine life-giving power by which Jesus healed broken humans and communities. And that same divine life-giving power is in the promised Holy Spirit that God through Christ has left with us- his disciples, the ones who have followed him despite the ambiguity and questions. Despite the fear and terror.

The God we follow is all about the resurrection business- about breathing life into what we thought was dead.

Concerned about our church? Then follow Jesus! He has already gone ahead of us- loving all those who he meets through acts of service that bring them life. Feeding them, clothing them, sheltering them, listening to them, treating them with dignity and respect. Let us follow Jesus and do likewise and trust that God will take care of the rest.

Concerned about our world? Then follow Jesus! Let us proclaim the good news of God in Jesus Christ through our every word and deed. At home, work, school and play. Let us be living examples of the power of God's love. Seek to listen, understand, and love others even in the face of hostility and anger.

The ambiguity of Mark's resurrection narrative suggests that there is more to life than meets the eye. More to this truth than Mark could ever satisfactorily convey. So, he didn't try. Instead, there is the invitation to trust God with our lives so much that we will join the disciples, drop everything, and follow the resurrected Jesus.

The resurrection gives us the hope of a future. That regardless of what it might bring, we have been claimed by the God who nothing not even the grave can resist.

So, bring your doubts, your fears, your amazement this morning. Join with the rest of us and sing praises to our God who is so powerful and gracious, and trust in the one who can reach into the grave and love us into life. The one who is with us always to the end of time.

Then let us follow Jesus into this world he so loved and write the ending of this gospel with our lives.