

4-5-26 Easter Sunday

Mark 16.1-8

“So 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.”

And with that, Mark leans back, places his quill on the table, allows the ink to dry, and then rolls up his now completed manuscript. The Gospel according to Mark. Finished.

We are in Year A of the Revised Common Lectionary cycle, which means we should have heard the Gospel of *Matthew* this morning. If I'd *read* from Matthew, this is what we would have heard at the end:

Then *Jesus* said to the women, "Do not be afraid;
go and tell my brothers and sisters to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

Similar to Mark, except it's Jesus speaking. But then we could read on for a few more verses, because Matthew isn't done. We would hear that Jesus comes to the disciples and gives them what we have come to call 'The Great Commission':

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.

And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Then Matthew leans back, places his quill on the table – perhaps next to Mark's manuscript, which he's been basing his own biography of Jesus on – and says, “Now *that's* how you end a Gospel. None of this, “and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.”

Apparently some well-meaning second century scribe had the same thought, because if you're reading along in the pew bible, you'll see there's another 12 verses after verse eight of chapter 16. Verses which don't appear in any of the earliest manuscripts we have. And this *new ending* concludes like this:

“The disciples went out and proclaimed the good news everywhere while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that accompanied it.”

Again, we can perhaps picture that scribe leaning back, putting down *his* quill and saying, “Now, Mark, *that's* how you finish a Gospel. “That's what the people want to hear on Easter Sunday!”

So why did I step away from the Lectionary, and from Matthew's Gospel this morning? Why did I read *Mark's* account of the resurrection? Because, to be honest, it feels a bit more appropriate for the moment in which we find ourselves. And, perhaps, for the reality of some of our lives, much of the time.

“...for they were afraid.”

For some, if not many of us, hope for a better tomorrow feels elusive at the moment, for there is a great *deal* to fear. If that's true for you, then you share that experience with the disciples of Jesus, who must have felt great hope when they followed him into Jerusalem just a week ago, but who – following his *crucifixion* – must now be traumatized and terrified. This was *not* how the story was supposed to end, even if Jesus had told them that this was *exactly* what was going to happen. And so, when those courageous women come to the tomb – and make no mistake, they *were* courageous because Rome didn't permit care of the bodies they put on crosses – those faithful women, wondering how they're going to even get into the tomb, when they arrive they discover the huge stone has been rolled aside. And when they enter, they don't find Jesus' body. They find “a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed.” He tells them,

“Don't 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.”

“See – your hopes haven't been dashed! Jesus is not where the authorities sealed him up, thinking they'd dealt with him once and for all. So 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.”

“So 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.”

At other times in Mark's Gospel, people are told to be silent about Jesus, but they speak anyway. Here, they are told to speak but are silent! They feel amazement *and* terror. Hope *and* fear. How often is that true of our own lives? For how many of us is that true this morning? I imagine some of us have really been looking forward to being here today. To celebrate the day of greatest joy in the church calendar. To revel in the glorious music, the beauty of the flowers, to come to the Table of the Lord, to proclaim, “Christ is risen!”

And yet. And yet.

We're also carrying concerns. Fears. If our phone vibrates during the service, it might just be that terrible text we've been dreading. We may be ready to affirm our faith, to say with confidence, “I believe in the resurrection.” Yet know that all the little deaths we experience are still waiting for us when we leave.

All the hurt and pain of life. All the hopes. All the fears. The warp and weft of the tapestry of our lives. And even when we *do* get what we hope for, sometimes that fear still lingers, because it might be taken from us at any moment.

So yes, I chose Mark instead of Matthew today. Because, in this moment, it hits me where I live. Hope and fear. Joy and grief. Contentment and dissatisfaction. “Terror and amazement.”

“Go, tell his disciples!”

“But they said nothing to anyone.”

Yes, the one who was crucified has been raised – alleluia! Yet there’s still so much suffering all around us. So, what *is* the Gospel for us *this* Easter Sunday? What *is* the good news we need for such a time as this. Perhaps it’s the message that mysterious figure gave the women to carry:

“Go, tell his disciples – and Peter – that he is going ahead of you, to Galilee.”

Ultimately our hope is not that everything is going to be alright, because, clearly, some of the time it isn’t. Our hope, ultimately, is that when we get to whatever that thing is, Jesus will meet us there, because he goes ahead of us. Not in some esoteric or mystical way, but in a very tangible way. Because wherever we may find ourselves, Jesus has been there before. He knows what it is to lose someone you love. To be let down by someone you trusted. To be betrayed by someone you love.

To see that awful thing that you know is coming *and keep walking towards it all the same*. *And* he knows the joy of friendship. The joy of people being healed. The joy of shared meals. The joy of watching people reconcile.

Joy and sorrow. Hope and fear.

The Gospel is that, no matter what the future holds for any of us, all that we hope for, all that we fear, God – in Jesus – is intimately acquainted with it all.

Even death.

And Jesus goes ahead of us, so that whatever *is* waiting for us in the future, he will meet us there, because – as *Matthew* would want me to remind you this morning – he told his disciples,

“Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

So, as we come to the tomb this Easter morning, where will we find Jesus’ body? Look around. *Here* is the body of Christ. *This* is how Jesus is with us, even to the end of the age: in his body, the community of the Spirit, the Church. His people: you and I. People who also know joy and sorrow. Hope and fear. People we can lean on when we need someone who understands. People who will sit with us in silence if that’s what we need. People who will pray with us, and for us. And if that thing you fear is not in the distant future, but feels like it might be just around the corner, or perhaps, has already arrived, Easter hope is the quiet, stubborn insistence that – as Frederick Buechner would want me to remind you – the worst things are never the last things.

For Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

Amen, and amen.