

Mark 16:1-8

When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. They had been saying to one another, ‘Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?’ When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. 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.’ 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.

### **“Look, Go, Tell and See”**

One of my colleagues in ministry at Second Presbyterian Church, Kirianne Weaver, was a talented actress, artist and musician. Kiri and I also went to Princeton Theological Seminary together. While she was in seminary Kiri did an independent study where she memorized Mark’s Gospel and gave two readings of it as her final. She also gave her performance and interpretation of Mark’s Gospel, on Wednesday evening of Holy Week my first year at Second Presbyterian Church. What I missed in Seminary, I was privileged to experience in a congregational setting. Kiri ended her reading, “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.” After a brief pause she exited the stage. Many church members had never heard Mark’s oldest manuscript ending, often called “shorter” ending of Mark’s Gospel. The listeners waited and looked for Kiri’s return but she did not emerge from the door through which she had departed. Most folks were confused. What happened to the resurrection accounts, the food Jesus shared with the disciples, the walking through walls, the disciples’ recognition of Jesus, the great commission? After awhile some people got up to leave. Others looked at their neighbors and asked, “That is the end? What do you do with that?” Congregants grabbed their pew Bibles to look at the end of Mark. They were shocked by the footnotes in their NRSV Bibles. “That is the oldest manuscript ending? Well I never knew that!”

Our memories meld the four Gospel and Acts of the Apostle’s accounts of Jesus’ resurrection into one long story. We begin to believe the various testimonies say the same thing and speak in the same way. What are we supposed to do with this tiny narrative account of Jesus resurrection found in Mark? The congregants of Second had the right to question this new and jarring revelation. Eight verses! That is it? This is the resurrection and new life? Mark’s last sentence drops on us like a bucket of water, splashing all over the hopeful end we cling to.

How can the end of the good news be the women fleeing the tomb in terror and amazement and telling no one? What was Mark thinking? Can resurrection life, new life, come to those who flee; through those who flee?

Frederich Buechner said at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, “Anxiety and fear are what we know best in this fantastic century of ours. Wars and rumors of wars. From civilization itself to what seemed the most unalterable values of the past, everything is threatened or already in ruins. We have heard so much tragic news that when the news is

good we cannot hear it.”<sup>1</sup> Perhaps the responses of the women at the tomb are simply emblematic of our human nature. We are often overcome by fear to the point we can't see hope when it is in front of us. Yet God promises us new life that shatters all our fears both here on earth and in God's eternal care.

The young man in the white robe proclaimed, “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.” All the elements of a resurrection story are here. The stone has been rolled back because the tomb could not contain Christ. God broke the bonds of death. But I think Mark revealed this good news not only by the young man in white, but through the women's actions as well. Henri Nouwen once wrote, “The mystery of Jesus' love [is that] God reveals himself in Jesus as the one who waits for our response. Precisely in that waiting the intensity of God's love is revealed to us.”<sup>2</sup> It is God's love and vindication of Jesus life and ministry that breaks the chains of sin and death for us. God chose to love and reconcile us to God's self knowing our response will always be less than adequate. In Mark the good news shines on us all! God has chosen to act by raising Christ. Rightly so, we are receivers of that loving and costly grace.

Every day at my first ordained call one minister took the duty of greeting and aiding walk-ins who needed food or gas assistance. The hard part of the walk-in ministry for me was that many of those who came in our church doors needed so much more than food or gas—and I don't mean a referral to a social work agency. Their lives were hard and their wounds were deep. With no pastoral relationship formed I would sit and listen to their troubles and sorrows and then I would pray with them when they were ready to leave. One middle-aged woman with a toddler looked to me with tears in her eyes and said, “Pastor I need this food, but I need other help more. My life is a mess. Some of it my fault, some of it is others. What I need most from you is to hear words of God's forgiveness.” I shared with her the words of forgiveness I say each week in our assurance of pardon. “I declare to you that in Jesus Christ, you are forgiven.” With her head still downcast and her body shaking she said through her tears, “What I mean is that I am not sure those words are for me anymore.” We sat in silence for a while and I prayed for God to provide her with the assurance that nothing she could do would ever put her beyond God's forgiveness. The end of Mark's gospel came to mind.

I asked, “You know Mark's Gospel?” “It's been a long time since I've read it.” she said. “Doesn't matter. It ends in a different way than the other three. Some women come to the tomb expecting to tend to Jesus' dead body. When they get there God has already raised him. They do not see him, but are told what happened and that he awaits them in Galilee, his hometown. Do you know what they did in response?” “No” she shook her head. “They fled in fear! The good news that God conquered our sin and death by raising Jesus had been proclaimed. In Mark, none of the disciples ever fully give the response to Jesus God desires. Yet God is gracious anyways. What God has already done we cannot undo. God loved those women who fled in fear.” She licked her lips and said, “I think I've been fleeing from God's love most my life.” We talked a little longer and I prayed with her again. I don't know if sharing Mark's resurrection story and the response of the women helped restore her hope or not. We never met again. What I do know is that

we all need Mark's ending, his proclamation of grace to those who don't understand what we are witnessing most of the time.

Again words from Frederick Buechner fit Mark's resurrection story. "The proclamation of Easter is that all is well. In the end, God's will, not ours, is done. Love is the victor. Death is not the end. The end is life. Christ's life and our lives through him, in him."<sup>3</sup> Mark's account points to what we need to hear and know. God chose to vindicate all of Jesus' teachings and ministry, by raising him from the dead when humanity chose to put him to death for showing who God is. We chose death; God made a way for new life to emerge and triumph over death and sin.

Jesus is alive! His work goes on beyond the limits of Mark's ending. In fact that is what Mark is trying to point us to! He tells us to go to Galilee, to go home and share this news with others, for the scriptures have been fulfilled. There you will see Jesus for God promised it would be so. Terrified followers, deniers, sinners, all of us who flee—the promise is given to us. We will see Jesus!

Mark would have appreciated that my colleague Kiri left the sanctuary and didn't return after her reading. Kiri, like Mark, left her listeners to ponder the mysterious way God brings new life out of death and fleeing. Look, go, tell and see, commanded the young man in white. See how every part of our life will be resurrected as we encounter God. God is waiting: for our proclamation, our return, our trip to Galilee.

Christ our Lord is risen. Alleluia! Amen!

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<sup>1</sup> Frederick Buechner in *Bread and Wine: Readings for Lent and Easter* (Orbis Books: Maryknoll NY, 2003) 292.

<sup>2</sup> Henri Nouwen in *Bread and Wine: Readings for Lent and Easter* (Orbis Books: Maryknoll NY, 2003) 182.

<sup>3</sup> Buechner, 292.