

Easter Sunday
April 1, 2018
Mark 16:1-8

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen.

"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."

He is going ahead of you to Galilee. Huh? If I were composing this story, this isn't the way I would have ended it. It's not the way we want it. Mark, give me a post-resurrection appearance and encounter with Jesus. Don't leave the women alone in their fear and seemingly paralyzed to go tell the disciples and Peter as the angel commanded. It's clear others felt this way as we have 2 other ending, a shorter and longer one, added at some point later. Those two tell us the women did go out as the angel commanded and of post-resurrection encounters with Mary Magdalene and the disciples.

This is what I want and another part of me wants Jesus to go back to Jerusalem first. To knock on Pilate's door and when he answers to say, "April Fool's Day." And then perhaps go to the high priest and other religious leaders doors and say the same thing. But that's not Jesus. He's not in the business of getting revenge. Of telling others "Hah, I told you so." Of getting even. His resurrection from the tomb has already done that and now, according to Mark, what's the risen Jesus doing. He's gone ahead to Galilee. He told the disciples as much in verse 28 of chapter 14, "After I am raised, I will go ahead of you to Galilee." Mark tells us in verse 14 of Chapter 1, following his baptism and temptation in the wilderness that Jesus goes to Galilee to proclaim the good news and reveal the kingdom of God.

Mark's ending doesn't seem to make sense. But we have to realize who Mark was writing to. His community of believers was living under the reign of the Roman Emperor Nero. He was deemed the "great persecuter" of those early Christians and it has been said was responsible for the deaths of Peter and the Apostle Paul. Imagine if you will, the state of mind they must have been in. Afraid; even, to the point of telling people who they were – Christians. Followers of Jesus. Perhaps, even guilty for failing to proclaim the good news. They were trapped in their fear.

So, there you are listen to Mark read his gospel and then you get to the end. You know the story. Jesus died. Jesus rose. But then Mark concludes with these 3 faithful women failing to do as the angelic figure said, "To go and tell his [Jesus'] disciples and Peter." And instead, they flee the tomb, seized by terror and say nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

I bet it sounded very familiar. Hit home. After all, these 3 women have been faithful to Jesus throughout the gospel they have just heard Mark read. They have remained by his side even to the point of death; unlike, his disciples. They have cared for Jesus and even that first Easter morning, come to the tomb despite they didn't know how the stone would be removed. Yet they went to care for their Lord's dead body and preserve it from decay. And then these 3 faithful women seemingly fail and are left in fear.

I can imagine this passage and Mark's ending was comforting to them. It was, indeed, good news because the gospel did meet them right where they were at. Surely, they heard the angel's words, "Do not be alarmed. Do not be afraid" and recalled what Mark had just read to them. Those words are uttered 3 times by Jesus in Mark. Once here, and then in the face of death and in the face of hopelessness, chaos, and great fear. That first time a leader of the

synagogue, Jairus, has sought Jesus out to heal his ailing daughter. But she dies and the disciples tell him to stop bothering Jesus for she is dead. He is in great fear. Jesus says, “do not be afraid” and proceeds to heal his daughter and raise her up. The next time is when the disciples are in the boat on the sea. They are being battered by a storm and Jesus comes to them walking on water. They think they see a ghost. Jesus says, “Do not be afraid.” And he calms the storm. He meets them in their fear.

Surely, they realized Jesus has gone ahead. His mission isn't done. The resurrected Christ is true to his word and continues the work they have just heard Mark read to them. To heal the sick. To eat with sinners. To offer forgiveness. To tend the lame. To reveal God's love to all people. To lift up the fact God's kingdom is not for some but for all. To overcome hatred with love. To repeal death with life. This is the final say. This is what the resurrection is all about. Life. Jesus is about life. Even when we are trapped and immobilized by fear Jesus has gone ahead, leading the way, and meeting the world in the midst of pain and suffering. He is ushering in peace. He has gone ahead to Galilee.

Mark also tells the women to go and tell his disciples and Peter. What did Peter do just 3 days ago? He denied knowing Jesus. What do you suppose some of these first hearers of Mark's gospel have done? And what are they also surely aware of. That Jesus did go ahead of the women to Galilee. That he did encounter those first disciples. That he did graciously forgive Peter and love him and then sent him out to carry on the work of the risen Christ. Love rules.

I recently watched the movie Patriots Day. It tells the story of the Boston Marathon bombing. Following the movie itself are interviews with those who lived out this horrific event. First responders and police and FBI personnel and also those injured. One of the survivors, who

lost a leg, sits next to his wife who lost both legs, and says, "It took weeks and maybe months for this act of hatred to be planned and carried out, but it took seconds for love to respond."

When we go back to Galilee. When we reread the gospel of Mark. Witness the life, ministry, death and resurrection we see love respond. We see love overcome death. Have the final say. We will encounter fear. Perhaps, some of you even come today with that fear. Jesus says, "Do not be afraid." Remember, I am with you in death. I am with you in times of chaos and all the storms of the world are crashing upon you. I am with you in your isolation, fear, and utter inability to respond to the command I have issued you. But I have gone ahead and I will come to you. I live and so will you. I will offer forgiveness and strength to also go ahead and proclaim the good news. Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again! Alleluia!