

Easter

April 4, 2021

Mark 16:1-8

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

### Promise, Hope, Joy

The 2014 movie *Draft Day* (Ivan Reitman, Director; Odd Lot Entertainment and Montecito Picture Company) stars Kevin Costner, who plays Sonny Weaver Jr., a fictional character that is the General Manager of the Cleveland Browns football team. As the title implies, it is draft day, perhaps the next biggest event in the National Football League outside of the Super Bowl. Teams plan for months on which college prospect to pick. The first scene of the movie opens on the morning of the draft in which Sonny is just about to leave for the office, but before he does, he jots something down a piece of paper, folds it up and places it in the inside pocket of his suit coat. We do not see that note again until right before the draft begins. Sonny endures quite the day. His job is on the line to make the correct pick. He has been pressured from every angle to take the quarterback, Bo Callahan, who everyone has slotted as a sure bet, the best prospect in years. Sonny seems at odds with that decision the entire movie until minutes before the draft when his fiancé played by Jennifer Garner, also employed by the Browns organization, finds that note and reminds him of it. That note says, "Vontae Mack No Matter What." Vontae Mack was a linebacker who is cast as a fine prospect, but surely not as good as Bo Callahan and worthy of the number one pick in the draft held by the Browns. Upon seeing that note, Sonny selects Vontae with the top spot in the draft to the surprise and dismay of the owner, coach, and Cleveland fan base. In the end, it all works out for the best. There are some surprise moves on Sonny's part after that selection, which I will leave for those who may not have watched the movie.

Promise, Joy, Hope ... Three words I jotted on my own sticky note Monday afternoon following our noon discussion of Mark's rendering of the resurrection and time in reflection and prayer. At the time, I was not quite sure what to do

with those three words, but I knew no matter they would be the focal point of this message. I folded the note up and placed it in my billfold to carry with me throughout the week, pulling it out from time to time to further ponder.

Promise, joy, hope is at times challenging to hear, see, and experience in our world. I do not need to elaborate any further given the year we have traversed since last Easter and the devastating storms and senseless violence of the last couple weeks. We come to Easter to hear a word to help us escape those realities and instead we hear Mark's gospel filled with bewilderment, fear, alarm, terror, and failure on the part of the three women to go and tell the disciples that Jesus has risen and will meet them in Galilee. Mark also gives us no resurrection appearance of Jesus. It seems to stop rather abruptly.

Yet, promise, hope, joy ... it is there. Even though we may not initially see it. Even if we may falter at times to proclaim it. Because even some of the most faithful servants of Christ struggle to comprehend and announce the good news, such as these 3 women who have stuck with Jesus through thick and thin, come to the tomb to care for his dead body risking the very real possibility Roman guards may be there waiting and watching over the tomb. Even the best of pastors at times finds it difficult to preach it. Even faithful disciples today at times become seized by fear and fail to journey with Jesus to Galilee and proclaim the good news.

This text does not say we cannot be afraid; but rather gives us permission to be afraid, experience life in the flesh, acknowledge loss, and grieve the death of a loved one just as those faithful women did. The promise written on the page is God meets us in that fear, terror, and failure to go and tell. God's messengers continue to come to us and say, "Do not be alarmed!" We see it time and time again in the Bible, this divine promise. At times, we are those messengers sent to bear God's promise, the assurance of hope that helps us through our fear.

Jim Friedrich states, "Easter isn't something we remember. It's something we live and breathe."<sup>i</sup> Even amidst fear. Even amidst death. We are Easter people and no matter what joy and hope find a way to flow forth from the promises of God. The promise Jesus has been raised from the dead. The promise that not only is he with us, but he goes ahead of us and therefore we know we can too even

when the stones ahead of us look to big to venture around. The promise God has done the incomprehensible in conquering death and ushering in a new beginning in which life always finds a way. The promise of eternal life and forgiveness. The promise you are loved, unconditionally and without question.

Hope blossoms forth from this day and God's promises. Hope the sun will rise on a new day. Hope evil will never have the final say. Hope love will prevail. Hope that illness, death, pandemics will give way to life. Hope division will give way to reconciliation. Hope fear will give way to strength and assurance. Hope that resurrection will happen every day. Hope darkness will turn to light. Hope grief will turn to joy.

He is risen is the promise. He is risen is the hope. He is risen is our proclamation of joy. This day, what God has done, what Jesus has done, the promise, hope and joy of this day is the note in our pocket that we carry with us. No matter what ... we are Easter people, messengers of promise, hope and joy.

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<sup>1</sup> Jim Friedrich; "Preaching on Easter Sunday Isn't About Convincing People"; *The Christian Century*; April 3, 2019.