

## Back To Galilee

You might think that the writer of Mark's gospel ran out of ink, or paper, and at just the wrong time.

How else to explain his ending?

See, forget the last two sentences that we heard this morning.

That's not how the earliest manuscripts of Mark end.

Instead, the earliest manuscripts end with the women fleeing in terror and amazement.

So, come for a moment and reflect....

A young man alone in an otherwise empty tomb, saying something about Jesus having risen, and going on ahead to where it all began...

Imagine their shock, these heretofore exceptionally brave women, the only ones who don't desert Jesus, the only disciples with the guts to stand nearby and watch him die, who gather round him as he is taken off the cross, who follow as he is buried, who then come with spices and oils for the final benediction for his body; these valiant women find themselves running away from the tomb, trembling with astonishment, saying nothing to anyone, for they are terrified.

The end, according to the original author of Mark's Gospel.

It's a tough ending to swallow.

We like our stories to wrap up sensibly and with some finality; that way I can chalk up Jesus rising from the dead as a marvelous miracle, or a fanciful tale; and be done with it.

But this ending?

Women running away terrified?

Saying nothing to anyone?

Several years ago, a student did a one-man play of the Gospel of Mark.

He prepares for years, memorizing the lines, working out the characters, finding just the right tone.

It is a very good play, very raw, very emotional, and he performs it first in a large church in front of a packed audience.

When he gets to the end of the play, and delivers that last line:

“and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid,”

the audience sits there, in breathless expectation, as if to say, “yes, go on!”

But the student, for all of his preparation, did not completely think this through.

So he shifts from foot to foot, and after some very long seconds pass, abruptly shouts: “Amen!” and runs off the stage.

The audience, relieved, bursts into applause.

The student later talks about how much pressure he felt to add to the ending of Mark.

That pressure is nothing new.

It goes all the way back to the earliest monks who made copies of the gospels; those monks couldn't stand the pressure of this ending either.

So they fixed it.

And today, as we heard in the last two sentences this morning, Mark's gospel doesn't end like a cliffhanger at all.

Instead, Mark's gospel today ends with a neater ending about the Risen Jesus showing himself, walking with his disciples and sending them all out into the world.

From the earliest days of the church, it seems, Mark's original ending leaves people mystified, and troubled.

So what about our student and his play?

Well, determined to be true to Mark's original gospel, the next time he performs the play, he resists the temptation to fix the dangling ending.

After saying the last line, he pauses a few dramatic seconds, then, in silence, walks off the stage.

There is no applause.

There is only discomfort and uncertainty as the audience sits, first in silence, and then, finally, shuffling toward the exit, feeling the anxiety of this non-ending. T. Long, *Preaching From Memory To Hope*, 128.

Mark, you see, isn't interested in convincing us that Jesus rose from the dead.

Mark is interested in making us *followers* of Jesus.

Mark isn't interested in what we *think*, he's challenging us to *do*.

It is in Galilee where it all began; and it is back to the beginning that the young man sends the women, and the cowardly men; it's back to the beginning, with all of its uncertainty, all of its wonder, all of its doubts; all of its anxieties --- that's where they meet Jesus once again --- and not only them, but you and me as well.

We go back to Galilee when we feed the hungry and visit the sick and cloth the naked.

We go back to Galilee when we erase the lines we so casually draw around and between people and groups of people, declaring some to be insiders and the rest outsiders.

We go back to Galilee when we choose to live a life of trust in God, not the kind of trust that says if I'm good, God will do the right thing and reward me.

That's not Christian trust at all.

Christian trust is something much more risky, much more profound.

It is putting my life today in the care of God - letting go of control - letting go of my fears and anxieties over what the outcomes will be, and in that letting go, trusting that whatever the outcome, all will be well, and all will be well, and all manner of things will be well; because today we have the gift of Jesus tortured, mocked, nailed and dying - yet when we go to his tomb, he isn't there...

We as a country are so far from this kind of trust as to make the claim that we are a Christian nation not only laughable but nearly revolting.

We have, since World War II become a nation obsessed with war, and the last three decades have seen us in a near constant state of war – from Grenada to Panama to Iraq 1 then on to Iraq 2 and now in the daily barrage of murdered innocents and drone attacks from the sky -- we are mired in that graveyard of empires, Afghanistan.

Yet that is not all.

Already the sabers are rattling for an attack on Iran.

All of these wars are fought because, we are told, we need to be safe, we need to be secure.

And Jesus weeps.

Easter, if we are to pay more than lip service to God, is the day to repent of our blasphemous reliance on weapons of destruction and self-help and pre-emptive war, and return to the empty tomb in Jerusalem where God, once and for all, says to all of humanity, that God's breath is the air that we breath, and God's love is stronger than death and God's desire is that we find ways to live in peace; but if peace cannot be found, then to make our example not Caesar, but Jesus.

We Christians are called out of the world, but that doesn't mean we are meant to ignore the world.

We are called out of the world to live lives that reflect the life of Jesus; a life of dedicated non-violence; a life of willing self-sacrifice; a life that at the beginning of the day and at its end,

places all things, all circumstances, all results, all fears, all hopes, all anxieties: all that is, into the hands of the good Lord who created all that is.

This is resurrection, and this is the resurrection-life, lived not in some pie in the sky in the sweet by and by, but today, now, right now.

Peter Rollins says it this way:

“Without equivocation or hesitation I fully and completely admit that I deny the resurrection of Christ.

This is something that anyone who knows me could tell you, and I am not afraid to say it publicly, no matter what some people may think.

I deny the resurrection of Christ every time I do not serve at the feet of the oppressed, each day that I turn my back on the poor; I deny the resurrection of Christ when I close my ears to the cries of the downtrodden and lend my support to an unjust and corrupt system.

However there are moments when I affirm that resurrection, few and far between as they are.

I affirm it when I stand up for those who are forced to live on their knees, when I speak for those who have had their tongues torn out, when I cry for those who have no more tears left to shed.”

Clarence Jordan, a twentieth-century Christian saint, says:

“The proof that God raised Jesus from the dead is not the empty tomb, but the *full hearts of his transformed disciples*.

The crowning evidence that he lives is not a vacant grave, but a *spirit-filled fellowship*.

Not a rolled-away stone, but a *carried-away church*."

No wonder the women fled the tomb in terror.

Putting on the cloak of trust in God is a terrifying thing indeed.

It calls for the surrender of all that we are, individually and nationally.

It beckons us into a world where the myth that violence can somehow cure what ails us is unmasked for the fraud, the vicious lie, that it is; and invites us to live lives of profound trust that the God whose word calls all things into being is a faithful God; despite so many appearances to the contrary.

Such is the meaning of the empty tomb.

This is Easter.

And we shall each of us find it if we are willing to return to Galilee, back to the beginning, back where it all started, yet this time, with the risen Lord leading the way.

Let it be so.

