

Easter 2021

This Easter, we hear about the resurrection of Jesus from St. Mark; whose Gospel starts with these words:

“The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”

Mark begins not with Luke’s babe in the manger, or Matthew’s Magi, or John’s Word of God; but with the adult Jesus.

Showing up at the Jordan River.

Seeking baptism.

And Mark’s gospel ends as abruptly as it begins.

In fact, it seems his typewriter gives out at just the wrong moment.

How else to explain his ending?

With the women fleeing – in terror and amazement?

It’s even more abrupt when you hear the literal Greek:

“So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; to no one anything they said; afraid they were for...”

So, come for a moment and wonder.

A young man in white sits in an otherwise empty tomb, saying something about Jesus being raised.

Something about going back to where it all began.

To Galilee.

Imagine the shock of these exceptionally brave women.

They're the only ones who don't desert Jesus,.

It is they who stand nearby and watch him die.

They who cradle him as he is taken off the cross.

Who follow as he is buried.

Who come before dawn with spices and oils for the final anointing of his body.

They can deal with the dead.

But these valiant women are running and trembling and silent — because no one knows how to deal with a dead man who refuses to stay dead!

They run away in terror.

That's how the very first gospel to be written — ends.

It's tough to swallow.

Where is Mary Magdalene, recognizing him in the garden?

Where are the two disciples who see the risen Lord on the road to Emmaus?

Mark gives us none of these comforting stories.

Instead, he sends us back to Galilee.

Back to where the ministry of Jesus first begins.

With all of its uncertainty.

All of its wonder.

All of its doubts and anxieties.

That's where they will meet Jesus once again.

And so shall we.

Maybe you're thinking, "I've never been to Galilee!"

Ah, but you have.

We go to Galilee whenever we feed the hungry.

Or visit the sick.

Or clothe the naked.

We go to Galilee whenever we erase the lines we so casually draw around people.

When we refuse to declare some to be insiders and others outsiders.

We go to Galilee whenever we choose to live a life of trust in God.

But not the kind of trust that says: "if I'm good, God will reward me."

That's not Christian trust at all.

Christian trust is far more risky.

Christian trust puts my life -- today -- in the care of God.

Letting go of control over people, places and things.

Letting go of my fears and anxieties over what the outcome might be.

And in that letting go, resting in the assurance that all will be well.

Because today we have the gift of Jesus.

Tortured.

Mocked.

Nailed and dead.

Yet, when we go to his tomb, he isn't there.

The grave can't hold him.

He's moved on.

On to Galilee.

I think what Mark might be telling us today is that everything we think we know about death, is all wrong.

We think of death as the sum and substance of human existence.

After all, no one gets out of this life alive, right?

Not to mention all of the small deaths we face.

Illness and loss.

Even betrayal sometimes.

But maybe, just maybe, “if God can raise someone from the dead in the middle of human history, that very fact reveals that death ... is not inevitable.” J. Alison, *The Joy of Being Wrong*, 118.

Maybe what Mark is getting at is that the resurrection changes the very nature of who we are.

Once we were doomed to death.

But God, in whom there is no death, adopts us, as children.

And gives us God’s life.

A life in which death not only does not, but cannot exist.

“That God not only forgives what we’ve done, but that God shapes her forgiveness in such a way that it reaches into the very essence of who we are.

Changing us from creatures who are defined by death — into people over whom death has lost its power. Id., paraphrased.

Which doesn’t mean life suddenly becomes a bed of roses.

Or that faith somehow gives us a free pass on suffering.

The cross remains!

But the question becomes:

What if the resurrection is NOT a marvelous escape from the world's pain and suffering?

What if the resurrection instead takes us directly INTO the world's pain and suffering?

Meaning, what if we've been wrong when we think that the resurrection defeats the cross?

What if the resurrection explains, even embraces, the cross?

Jesus, as we all know, routinely rejects "the rules of respectability" as he eats with taxmen and prostitutes.

He invites us to consider that even the best intentioned religious laws are often twisted by those with power to injure, exclude, and marginalize those who are different, unattractive or poor.

Jesus reshapes the institutions of family and church and state, by insisting that his identity is based not on the womb that bore him but upon those who follow him.

Whose temple is made not of stone, but of compassionate hearts.

Whose loyalty isn't to the nation, but to the Father who creates all that is.

And in return, Jesus incurs the wrath, the rage, the condemnation of our fine, upstanding, death-dealing institutions." Jennings, *The Insurrection of the Crucified*, 309, paraphrased.

Behold, the crucified Messiah!

If you say "no" to the powers and principalities of death that still pretend to rule our world, there might be a cross waiting for you too.

In other words, if you choose to follow Jesus, you will be confronted by what St. Paul calls "the wisdom of the world."

A "wisdom" that condemns God as foolish, unrealistic, even crazy.

The brave women fleeing the tomb know this.

That's why they're running!

They're right to be frightened!

Because discipleship is frightening!

It implies martyrdom.

Which may be why the young man who greets them in the tomb is clothed in white.

That's the color of martyrs.

Because the resurrection of Jesus means "that the small god of our civil society, the one who we stamp on our money, who blesses our wars and economies and bigotries, that god is a lie. Id.

The so-called practical people who tell us that war and economic disparity and dog eat dog are simply the way things shall always be... it is a lie.

The truth is that the resurrection is God's "yes" to a humanity dying for compassion and gentleness and friendship

A "yes" rooted in hope, kindness and love.

A "yes," that even when it is killed, refuses to stay dead!

We are called to live lives that reflect the life of Jesus.

Lives of non- violence.

Lives of self-giving.

Lives that at the beginning of the day and at its end, place all results, all fears, all anxieties into the hands of the good Lord who creates all that is.

It's completely unrealistic, I know.

Yet Jesus calls us to live it not as pie in the sky, nor as a mere private devotion, but now.

In this world.

With each other.

No wonder the women skedaddle from the tomb in panic.

To trust God is a terrifying thing!

It calls for the surrender of all that we are.

Individually.

Communally.

And nationally.

It beckons us into a world where the myth that violence can somehow cure what ails us, is unmasked for the fraud that it is.

And invites us to live within the embrace of the God whose Word calls all things into being.

Today is Easter.

Do you dare to go back to the beginning?

Do you dare make the journey to Galilee?

+amen