

Back To The Beginning
Mk 16:1-8

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

"The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God."

And Mark begins not with stories of a babe in the manger, or angels visiting Mary, but with Jesus, a full grown man, coming to the Jordan River — to be baptized by John.

"The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God."

And here we are today, at the end of Mark's gospel, and frankly, you might think Mark's typewriter gave out at just the wrong moment.

How else to explain his ending, with the women fleeing in terror and amazement?

It ends even more abruptly if we translate the Greek literally.

"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..."

The end.

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

A young man, wrapped in white, the clothing of the martyrs, sits alone in an otherwise empty tomb, saying something about Jesus being raised, and going on ahead — to where it all began. . .back to Galilee.....

Imagine their shock, these 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 come with spices and oils for the final benediction for his body.

They know how to 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.

So ends Mark's gospel.

It's a tough ending to swallow.

I don't know about you, but I like my stories to wrap up sensibly and with some finality; that way I can chalk up Jesus rising from the dead as a marvelous one-off miracle, or a fanciful tale; and be done with it.

I can get back to life as usual.

But this ending?

Women running away terrified?

Saying nothing to anyone?

What's going on?

Well, maybe Mark isn't interested in **convincing us** that Jesus rose from the dead.

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

Maybe Mark isn't interested in what we **think**, maybe 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, dressed in martyr's white, 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 so can we.

Really, you ask?

But I've never left Hawai`i, much less traveled to *Galilee*.

Ah, but you have.

We go back to *Galilee* whenever we feed the hungry or visit the sick or clothe the naked.

We go back 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 back 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 something much more risky, much more profound.

Christian trust is putting 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, trusting 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 there, ahead of us, on the way to Galilee....

Perhaps what Mark is saying to us down through these many years is that what we think about death is all wrong.

We think death is the sum and substance of human existence: after all, no one gets out of this life alive, we say; 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, makes us children — and gives us God's life ... a life in which death cannot exist.

"That God is not only able to **forgive what we've done**, but that God shapes her forgiveness to reach into the very essence of **who we are**, and changes us, from creatures who are bound to die — into people over whom death has lost its sting. Id., paraphrased.

Which doesn't mean all is sunshine and roses.

Our own experience tells us that's not where it's at.

Quite the opposite.

But what if the resurrection is NOT intended to be a marvelous escape from the world's pain and suffering; what if the resurrection is intended to take us directly INTO the world's pain and suffering?

In other words, what if we've been wrong when we think 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 whores.

Jesus routinely rejects the religious laws by his healing on the sabbath and sending away men intent on stoning to death a woman caught in the very act of adultery.

Jesus routinely rejects the institutions of family and church and state, by announcing his true family is not linked to the womb that bore him but to those who follow him; whose temple is not made of stone but of flesh and blood, whose loyalty is not to the nation, but to the Father who creates all that is.

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

Just so, 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, to be a follower of Jesus, to live as Jesus invites us to live, is by necessity to come into conflict with what St Paul calls "the wisdom of the world" - a wisdom that sees God and Jesus as foolish, unrealistic, even crazy.

The brave women fleeing the tomb know this.

That's why they're running!

They are right to be frightened, because discipleship is a frightening thing!

It implies martyrdom, which may be why the young man who greets them in the tomb is clothed in white -- the color of martyrs.

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

The so-called wise men 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 decency and friendship — a "yes" that endures all things, hopes all things, believes all things; 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-sacrifice; lives that at the beginning of the day and at its end, place all results, all fears, all hopes, 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 spirituality, but now, in the world, with each other.

No wonder the women flee the tomb in terror.

To trust God is a terrifying thing indeed.

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.

This is Easter.

Do you dare to go back to the beginning?

Do you dare to go to Galilee?

+amen