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Mark 16:1-8

Where We Go from Here?

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Mark 16:1-8 New Revised Standard Version

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. They had been saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?” When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, “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.” So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

Where do we go from here? I wondered that this week after the horrific terrorist attacks in Brussels. Our 11-year-old flew into that airport last July and she spent a month in Belgium getting to know kids from all over the world. When I realized that it could have been my child in that attack, I wanted to go pick everyone up from school and never let them leave the house again. But then I realized that I don’t have much food in the house and I need to go to the grocery store so that never leaving the house again is probably not the best option.

Do you remember the story of Peter? Peter walked on the water until he sank. Peter denied Jesus three times before Jesus was killed. But it is the utter failure of Peter that guides and strengthens him for what happens next. Upon the sinking rock of Peter, the church was built and expanded to include the unworthy, the Gentile, everyone.

Where do we go from here? We journey into our fullness as we embrace all that we are, our doubt, our uncertainty, our temptations, our emptiness. Today is a day for new hope, a day for transformation of lives, especially for those who walk in uncertainty, fear, emptiness, temptation, loneliness, illness, economic hardship, prejudice and hatred. We are called to shine God’s light on the path for others because this is the day of our resurrection.

The Gospel reading today ended with fear and silence. Fear and amazement seized the faithful women that day. And the earliest versions of Mark’s Gospel end with the women running away from that empty tomb as quickly as they could, not saying a single word to anyone about what they had seen and heard. Fear and silence.

The women had been some of Jesus’ most faithful followers up to that point. The men disciples had betrayed Jesus or denied him or ran away when the soldiers showed up. The women followed Jesus to the cross where they kept vigil at his crucifixion, praying and weeping as Jesus drew his last breath. And on the day after the Sabbath, the women wanted to care for Jesus’ body. They woke up early, brought the appropriate spices, and walked to the cemetery. They were searching for closure. But I imagine they couldn’t talk about Jesus’ death, it was too raw. So they focused on details. They focused on the tasks to be done after someone dies. Who was going to let the others know about Jesus’ death? Who was going to call the florist? Were should the memorials go? Definitely their local church. They had to finish writing up the obituary. And Jesus had not written a will so they would have to go through probate.

As they walked I wonder if they were a tiny bit relieved? Following Jesus had gotten harder and harder for them. Jesus was constantly asking things of them, questioning the ways they had always lived their lives, encouraging them to take risks and to lift up the weakest and most defenseless people.

Being a disciple of Jesus was exhausting. And now that Jesus was dead, they were off the hook for living like he wanted them to. They could go back to the way things had been before they had seen the world through Jesus’ eyes. They could go back to making an uneasy peace with “the way things are.” The gap between the rich and the poor; the reality of domestic abuse and violence; the existence of slaves and masters; the everyone has his or her place mentality—now that their dream of God’s reign embodied by Jesus had died, they could go back to life as usual.[[1]](#footnote-2)

Was life without the presence of their crucified Lord heartbreaking and terribly disappointing? Yes. But was life without the presence of their crucified Lord easier and less controversial? Yes. If Jesus is in the tomb and the obituary is in the paper, then you go back to living the life of this world. With Jesus in the tomb, things could now go back to their old version of normal.

So what about us? What will happen with us, after the “Hallelujah Chorus” has been sung and Easter brunch is finished? What will we do when the egg hunts are over and we are ready for a Sunday nap? Maybe we will be disappointed that Easter has come and gone and that another regular Monday is on its way.[[2]](#footnote-3)

Will our dream of God’s reign embodied by Jesus get put back in the closet next to the Easter baskets until we pull it out again next year? Will we, like the women, make our uneasy peace with the way things are and go back to living the old version of normal life? Life without the presence of our crucified Lord is heartbreaking and disappointing, but it’s also less demanding.

But the women walked into that tomb and found some strange young man sitting there where Jesus’ body was supposed to be. “Don’t 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.” What? It’s not over? The women stood in that empty tomb holding all the trappings of death, feeling an intense mixture of grief and relief, only to hear this startling pronouncement of life. “He is not here,” the stranger said. “He is going ahead of you; you will see him, just as he told you.”

And the women could not comprehend what had just happened, so they fled from that tomb, and Mark’s Gospel claims they said nothing to anyone. And we are right back to where we began. Fear and silence. And in the earliest versions of Mark’s Gospel that is where the story ends and the torch is passed to us. The male disciples are locked in a room, the female disciples are running away in fear. It is up to us. The Lord is risen, and we are the only ones left to spread that good news. Because of fear and silence, we are the ones called to speak the power of Easter. We are the ones now charged with proclaiming that Jesus is on the loose and is still at work just as he told us he would be.

Here is the thing, in order to overcome the fear and the silence, we are called to trust and live the good news that silence and fear and death are not the end of the Jesus story. Silence and fear and death are not the end of our story. Silence and fear and death are not the end of creation’s story. God is not done with any of us yet. God is not done with this world yet. Jesus the Christ is risen. Jesus is on the loose in this sanctuary, in this city, in our world. The dream of God’s reign is not over by a long shot.[[3]](#footnote-4)

There are terrible things going on in our world. We feel the grip of terrorists but we can not live our lives in fear. We can’t hide in our homes reluctant to trust others. The power of God’s Easter good news will not end after the “Hallelujah Chorus” has been sung and we’ve all gone home. The claim of God’s Easter good news will not disappear once Easter Sunday gives way to Monday morning and it looks like things are back to normal. The promise of God’s Easter good news is that the risen Jesus is on the loose in our world, in our time, in our history, and in our lives.

As Easter people, there is no turning back now. There is no getting off the hook for living like Jesus wanted us to. We cannot roll the stone back in front of the tomb and keep Jesus contained, because Jesus, God-with-us, is alive. And he is calling us to move on down the road and to join him in proclaiming God’s Easter Yes! to this Good Friday-looking world. A life lived with our crucified and risen Lord is far more abundant and hope-filled and life-giving than we could ever imagine. The Lord is risen! He is risen indeed! No more fear. And no more silence.[[4]](#footnote-5)

1. From Rev. Shannon Kershner: http://www.fourthchurch.org/sermons/2015/040515.html [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. From Rev. Shannon Kershner: http://www.fourthchurch.org/sermons/2015/040515.html [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. From Rev. Shannon Kershner: http://www.fourthchurch.org/sermons/2015/040515.html [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. From Rev. Shannon Kershner: http://www.fourthchurch.org/sermons/2015/040515.html [↑](#footnote-ref-5)