April 5, 2015
Mark 16:1-8
Resurrection

Rev. Kerry Smith
Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

Mark 16:1-8 NRSV

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.

 They said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid. All the earliest manuscripts end right there. Which means that it is most likely that is where the writer of Mark’s Gospel wanted his story to end. Which we find completely unsatisfying and obviously the monks who copied Mark’s Gospel did as well, because later manuscripts added two alternative endings (one short and one longer).[[1]](#footnote-1) So, why would the writer end his Gospel like that? They said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

 The Gospel of Mark begins with these words, “The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” From the very beginning of the story, the listeners and the readers know who Jesus is. But throughout Mark’s Gospel the disciples don’t understand, and then at the end the women are seized with fear and don’t say a word that Jesus has been raised from the dead, that he is the Son of God. The ones who should understand don’t get it. But the demons know who Jesus is. A man with an unclean spirit calls Jesus, Son of the Most High God (Mark 5:7). The Roman Centurion at Jesus’ crucifixion knows who Jesus is. He says, “Truly this man was God’s Son” (Mark 15:39). And we know. We have known from the very beginning of the story. And so it is left to us to tell the good news about Jesus.

 It is up to us to tell the news that with God dead people don’t stay dead and broken lives don’t stay broken. The disciples thought that dead people stayed dead. And the idea that death doesn’t have to win, that was scary. Mystery is scary. Sometimes we would rather understand exactly how it works more than we would like victory or new life. We think that dead people stay dead and broken people stay broken.

But with God broken people don’t stay broken, and dead people don’t stay dead.

When I was growing up, one of my friend’s mom’s was so grumpy. And it was our first youth experience on the junior high mission trip and we were all dreading it because our grumpy friend’s mom was going. And she encountered the risen Christ on that mission trip and her life was changed. She found Jesus, and faith and hope. She was a teacher at one of the local elementary schools and she had to change schools because after that mission trip when her life was changed, she changed. She was not the same person, and the other teachers had a hard time with that. They thought that broken people should stay broken, and they would not let her change. But with God broken people don’t stay broken, and dead people don’t stay dead.

 “For Christians, Easter means that people can rise from the dead, and that relationships can, too. That even the bush that looks withered and brittle and lifeless can bloom, if given enough time, enough tending, enough love. A new season will come. There is always hope. What looks like the end might just be the beginning.” We have to go through the pain of Friday and Saturday, but Sunday is around the corner. The cross has to come before the resurrection. It’s the way of the world. And unless you bear witness to the truth, unless you face it head on and choose to open your heart to the pain, you won’t bear witness to the miracle, either. If you run away from the crucifixion, you might just miss the resurrection.[[2]](#footnote-2)

 I want to share with you a true story about something that happened at Goshen United Methodist Church in Piedmont, Alabama on Palm Sunday 1994.[[3]](#footnote-3) Kelly Clem was the pastor of that church then, and her 2 year-old daughter Sarah was in the church nursery and her 4 year-old daughter Hannah was in a blue and white choir robe sitting on the front row with the children’s choir. As worship got underway, the congregation heard wind blowing outside. The sky turned black, then the lightning began, followed by hail. Suddenly there was a burst of wind and the stained glass window shattered, and shards of glass shot across the sanctuary. Somebody shouted, “tornado!” and pieces of ceiling started to fall. There was a horrible sound as the roof of the church was ripped off, and the building crashed around them.

Pastor Kelly ran to check on her children, but a brick hit her on the head, and she fell hard on her shoulder. When she finally came to, she looked around at the devastation. Someone told her that her 2 year-old daughter Sarah, who was in the nursery, was okay. The nursery was still intact. Then Kelly looked to where her four year-old daughter Hannah had been sitting. There was nothing there but a pile of bricks. Under that pile of bricks, she could see little blue and white choir robes. Members of the church pulled Hannah and the other children out of the bricks, and Hannah was not alive. 19 people in the church died, and 86 others were injured that day.

Over the next few days, Pastor Kelly performed one funeral after another, including one for her own daughter. Toward the end of that awful week, Kelly began receiving phone calls from members of the congregation asking, “Pastor Kelly, are we having Easter this year?”

And Pastor Kelly knew they weren’t just asking about Sunday’s services. She knew they were saying, “Pastor Kelly, we desperately *need* Easter” and after leading 19 funerals, including the funeral of her own daughter, Pastor Kelly knew that *she* needed Easter also. So Pastor Kelly and her congregation planned an Easter sunrise service.

A few days after the tornado, a reporter asked Pastor Kelly if the disaster had shattered her faith. She said, “It has not shattered my faith. I’m holding on to my faith and my faith is holding me. All of the people of Goshen are holding on to one another, along with the hope that they will be able to rebuild. Easter is coming.”

That Sunday morning at the Easter sunrise service, 200 people gathered in the front yard of the destroyed church building at Goshen UMC. With a bandage on her head, her shoulder in a brace, and her heart breaking with grief, Pastor Kelly made her way to the makeshift pulpit. She opened her Bible, looked into the faces of her traumatized congregation, and then read these words from Romans 8: “nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Perhaps we have not faced a tornado or buried out daughter, but there are times when we are shattered because we or a loved one face a cancer diagnosis. When we are broken because of divorce or addictions, when we face despair because we lost a loved one or lost a job. That is when we need Easter because with God, broken people don’t stay broken, and dead people don’t stay dead. And it is our job to share that news. God helps us through anything. Praise God. Amen.

Benediction:

We have come from darkness and despair to hope and joy. We have been transformed by new life. Go forth to witness and to testify to the message of hope we have received this day. Christ is risen. Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia. Amen.

1. http://www.davidlose.net/2015/03/easter-b-only-the-beginning/ [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. http://momastery.com/blog/2015/04/03/easter-story/ [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. http://www.al.com/news/anniston-gadsden/index.ssf/2014/03/palm\_sunday\_at\_goshen\_a\_church.html [↑](#footnote-ref-3)