

Mark 16:1-8

16When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. ²And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. ³They had been saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?” ⁴When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. ⁵As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. ⁶But 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. ⁷But 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.” ⁸So 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.

**“We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.
Through the unknown, remembered gate
When the last of earth left to discover
Is that which was the beginning;
At the source of the longest river
The voice of the hidden waterfall
And the children in the apple-tree
Not known, because not looked for
But heard, half-heard, in the stillness
Between two waves of the sea.” T. S. Eliot**



Sermon – Easter, April 4, 2021 – St Andrew’s and St James

Easter - It's only the beginning....

Our Gospel this morning ends this way:

” ⁸So 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.

Is this really our Easter Gospel? Our Easter message? What a surprise this ending is...leaving us with the question Why?

Why did Mark leave the story hanging on this moment of paralyzing fear? Why would he do that? Many others long ago wondered the same, so much so that they added extra verses to make a more satisfying ending. But most scholars today

agree that what we've just heard is where the Gospel of Mark originally ended. The women, terrified and amazed fled the tomb. They were afraid and told no one. At least they told no one then, but they did tell eventually because today the world knows.

These devoted women, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome rose at first light after the Sabbath. It was their earliest opportunity to bring spices, to anoint Jesus' body. Already traumatized by Jesus' death, they were about to be surprised even traumatized again. Not only was the stone to the tomb rolled away, but Jesus' body was gone! There was a strange man in a white robe, telling them that Jesus of Nazareth had been raised. He was not there, he had gone ahead to Galilee. He had not paused to wait for the women. Jesus was on the move. He was gone and they were to tell Peter and the other disciples that they would find Jesus in Galilee. The women fled in fear!

Why would Mark leave us hanging like this? Maybe because he knew that no story about death and resurrection could possibly have a neat and tidy ending. **Maybe because he believed that this story wasn't over yet. Maybe the open ending to this resurrection account points us to join in...to do our part.**

The story of what God is doing through Jesus isn't over at the empty tomb.

It's only just getting started. Resurrection isn't a conclusion, it's an invitation. And Jesus' triumph over death, and the world's darkness isn't the only thing Mark's Gospel is about. Mark's Gospel is about us living resurrection lives and continuing God's redemption of the world.

Mark gives us a clue in the very first verse, of his Gospel. It is almost as abrupt and awkward as the closing verse. Mark, doesn't give us the long genealogy found in Matthew; nor the shepherds, angels, and baby born in a stable found in Luke; nor the hymn about the Word made flesh of John. Rather, Mark says simply,

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

Marks starts by saying that all of Mark's writing is *only the beginning of the good news* of what God has done and is still doing for the world through Jesus the Christ.

Here is a quote from the famous author T. S. Eliot. When I was graduating from Mount Allison, so many, many years ago, I chose this quote to go beside my photo in the year book.

“We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

Jesus of Nazareth is going ahead...to where it all started, in Galilee, so the women are sent there too.... Jesus is risen, and we are directed to Galilee. But what is significant about Galilee? Galilee is where Jesus began his ministry after John the Baptist was imprisoned. So going to Galilee may be Mark's way of saying we all need to return to the beginning of the gospel and read the whole thing again and understand it for the first time.

It's only the beginning; this story isn't over. It's only the beginning. There is still suffering and injustice in the world because God's not done yet. It's only the beginning, and Mark is inviting us to get out there and into the game. We are invited to share the good news of Jesus with everyone we meet. We are invited to share Jesus' compassion with those who suffer and his triumph over injustice and death. It's only the beginning, and we're empowered and equipped to work for good in all situations. Why? Because we trust God's promise that all things work together for good even when we can't see it now. *It's only the beginning...Amen.*