

Mark 16:1-8 The Pause of the Empty Tomb
April 4, 2021

All four gospels end with it, the proclaiming of this new beginning, that the man from Galilee has been raised from death. Three of the gospels tell of specific experiences when followers of Jesus encountered the resurrected Lord before he was taken up into heaven.

The disciples in Galilee where he gave the Great Commission in Matthew's version of the story; In Luke the two followers on the Road to Emmaus; the scenes in John in the locked room without, and later with Thomas, who could not bring himself to believe what he couldn't see; Mary in the garden, Peter and the others on the shore at breakfast time; they are all meaningful presentations of what must have been amazingly surreal experiences.

The Gospel of Mark is a little different. Although there is an ending to the story the reads like a compilation of some of the appearances from the other gospels, the "oldest and most reliable" manuscripts, as the text critics call them, have no resurrection appearances. The story ends at verse 8, with these words,

"Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid."

There is, of course, an academic conversation about the ending of this gospel. Did it originally end this

way? Is there a lost ending? When was the longer ending added, and by whom?

Interestingly, these questions are not answerable with the information at hand, but many believe the gospel *was originally intended* to end at the eighth verse. Letting the story end at this point creates a pause between the proclamation of the risen Christ, and the experience of the risen Christ. It gives us these three words, "trembling, bewildered, afraid, and also tells us that, at least for a time, the women were silent.

In other years we focus on the other gospels and on other Sundays in the Easter season, we can consider the other Resurrection encounters. Today, because the lectionary reading is Mark 16:1-8, let us situate our minds for a few moments on this happy day, in that pause.

We have been told that Jesus is alive but so far no one has seen him. In the story the only ones who know about it haven't told anyone. It is the pause of the empty tomb. Later everything else happens, including the history of the Christian faith right up to the present. But first the pause.

What does this proclamation mean? Perhaps the first thing to say is that in the immediate aftermath of the angel's astonishing announcement, "He is not here, he has risen," it doesn't mean anything at all, or better said, we have no idea what it means. For a moment or two, we are simply bathed in the news. As it washes over us we too are trembling a little, certainly

bewildered, and maybe afraid. We know of nothing else like this. And speechless, before we say much of anything to anyone, silent. Hear it, see the empty space where the body should be, but don't try to explain it, or understand it, theologize it too much.

Then ask yourself, do you believe it? Later, in John's gospel, Jesus is said to have commented on the difference between the faith of those who have believed after they have seen, and those who believed without seeing. Like it or not, even with the gospel accounts, and all the various kinds of religious experiences the faithful have had, we have not seen a physical manifestation of the risen Jesus. If we believe, we believe without seeing. As Paul put it in 2 Corinthians, "we live by faith, not by sight."

The first thing *is* to believe it. Faith might be the biggest hurdle. The Resurrection is the central miracle of the Christian faith after which all the others follow. And here we are in the pause, faced its telling.

While we are in this pause, we are confronted with the implications of our faith. What does it mean to live resurrection faith? There are exhortations to be made, though they are not original, they are worth mentioning.

Because of the resurrection of Jesus, let us be thankful in all things; for the precious gift of life in all its glory and wonder, for friends and family, for meaningful work, and for the promise of eternal life.

And because of the resurrection of Jesus, allow yourself to be joyful. While there is much sadness in the world and much to grieve, nonetheless be joyful.

Because of the resurrection of Jesus, love, our neighbors as ourselves. Restrain judgment and where failures of love are met, forgive; both friends and adversaries. Rise up from your failures and grant the space for others to rise up from theirs.

Because of the Resurrection of Jesus, be good. Do as much good as you are able, never becoming discouraged by your limitations or disheartened by failures. Become like our Methodist neighbors in the Wesleyan charge:

"Do all the good you can, by all the means you can
In all the ways you can, in all the places you can
at all the times you can, to all the people you can
as long as you ever can."

Gratitude and joy, faith, love and forgiveness; and goodness; these are the products of a life lived out of the miraculous faith in the miraculous Resurrection of Jesus. And to these we must add, hope.

Hope for the future both in this life and in the next. Hope for one's personal situation and hope for the world; an undying hope that is not defeated by the world's darkness because it is established in Christ's light, and shown forth in his raising. Now let all the other things happen. Happy Easter!

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