

Easter Day Mark 16:1-8a
Christ and Grace April 1, 2018
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Startle us, O God, with your truth,
the truth that Christ is risen and that love is stronger than death.
We come here this morning as the women came to the tomb,
with our uncertainties, our doubts and fears,
and with our hope and our love.
Startle us with the truth of the resurrection
and renew our hope, our love and our courage
in Jesus Christ, our risen Lord. Amen.¹

Were you startled by this Easter Gospel? If you were reading along with me you may think I forgot to read the last two sentences. Most biblical scholars say that Mark ends right where I ended it today, with the women fleeing from the tomb, seized with terror and amazement. Oh, the women hear that Jesus has been raised but Jesus is nowhere in sight. God has startled these women and at first they experience terror, but then they are amazed. Who could blame them for being afraid, for wanting to run away and say nothing? Who would believe them, anyway? Isn't that how you and I might have reacted?

I love this resurrection account because it's so real, and so very honest. It's so real, in fact, that over the next few centuries, scribes added not one but two additional endings to it to make it sound more like a joyful resurrection. Because isn't that what we want? A joyful resurrection where we can all say, "Alleluia!" But the women did not say alleluia at first and honestly, I can understand that.

Sometimes God startles us. Sometimes the good news, the answer to our prayers is not at all what we expected it to be. Sometimes the thing we have been keeping safely locked up in a tomb, holding onto, refusing to change, is in need of resurrection. And when God resurrects something in our lives, it can indeed make us want to flee in terror and amazement, at first, until we can see the promise of new life, until we recognize Jesus in the midst of it.

Arriving very early with spices to anoint the body of their Lord, the women find an empty tomb and a young man dressed in white, who not only tells them Jesus has been raised but that Jesus has gone ahead of them to Galilee. Since they fully expected to find Jesus' body there in the tomb, it took them some time to process the news, to realize that it was indeed good news. And of course we know they did not *stay* silent – eventually they told the other disciples and everyone else they saw – otherwise how would we be here today hearing this story and rejoicing in the power of the Resurrection?

I wonder why Mark wanted to tell the story this way? Maybe because he knew that no story about death and resurrection could possibly have a neat and tidy ending. Or maybe it's because

¹ A prayer by John Buchanan, April 16, 2006 sermon preached at Fourth Presbyterian Church.

he believed that this story isn't over yet. Perhaps Mark ends here, so that we can pick up where these women left off and share the good news announced by the messenger at the empty tomb.

Mark's Gospel calls us to live resurrection lives, walking in the way of Jesus as we continue the story of God's redemption of the world. We can see this if we look back at the very first verse of the very first chapter of Mark. In this Gospel, we don't get a long Christmas story with Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, angels and visiting wise men. When Mark begins his Gospel he says very simply, "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." It's only the beginning of the news of what God has done and is still doing for the world through Jesus Christ, because resurrection isn't an ending, it's a beginning - and that should be startling news!

The world news we hear day after day is filled with stories of mass shootings, political divisions, nuclear threats, and poverty. Add to that the personal pain and suffering of our own messy lives that we keep sealed up tight in tombs of our own making and it's more than enough to make us want to flee in terror.

In a world filled with uncertainties, doubts and fear, what we need more than anything is to hear the truth that Christ is risen and that love is stronger than death. Mark invites us to move on, from terror to amazement, just as the young man in white tells the women to move on, to go to Galilee, because Jesus has gone ahead and is waiting for us there.

We worship the God who meets us precisely at the point where things seem the worst, not merely to fix things, but to redeem them -- and us! -- turning what looks like an ending into a new beginning and taking what looks like a failure and offering it back to us an opportunity.

This resurrection story continues into our own lives. God wants to startle us with the good news that Christ is risen, and waits for us to join him in Galilee, waits for us to join him in a new way of life. "Go," the angel told the startled women on Easter morning. And that is God's word to us on this Easter morning. Go, and proclaim the good news -- join the children and write your alleluia on the sidewalk with chalk, write it on everything you do each day, because God has written it on your heart.

Alleluia. Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia.

With thanks to David Lose for inspiration for this sermon. <http://www.davidlose.net/2015/03/easter-b-only-the-beginning/>