

Mark 16: 1-8 ¹ 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. ² And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. ³ They had been saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?” ⁴ When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. ⁵ As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. ⁶ 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. ⁷ 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.” ⁸ 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.

Mark 16:1-8

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“Unfinished” OR “What More In the Name of Love?”

Rev. Amy Terhune

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. That is how the gospel of Mark originally ended. Right there after verse 8. Various scribes have added other stuff on late in the first century or early in the 2nd century, but it's not authentic to Mark. No, Mark ends just as I read it: 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. It's bizarre. I mean, first off, if it had gone down that way, we wouldn't know about it. We wouldn't be here, celebrating the Resurrection. I find myself wondering why Mark bothers to write down the story of Jesus' ministry and crucifixion in the first place, only to end with a fizz and a whimper and a big question mark. 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. I mean, so what? Did he get distracted, called someplace else? Did he die? Did pages get lost? Your guess is as good as mine! The scholars sure don't know!

Moreover, none of the other gospels tell it that way. The women are pretty freaked out, to be sure, but they do go back and tell the disciples, who (in Matthew) travel to Galilee to meet Jesus, who (in Luke) write it off as an idle tale until two on the road to Emmaus come running back with the same story, and who (in John) are pretty divided about it all until Jesus appears to them behind locked doors while Thomas is out running errands.

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. Uugh. And that is why, even though I've been preaching Easter for more than 20 years now, I have never – not once – preached from Mark's gospel on Easter... until today. The reason for that is relatively simple and somewhat prosaic: I just don't like it. Not only does it lack literary finesse and consistency, but it's theologically insipid. Mark devotes chapters 11, 12, 13, 14, and 15 to the final week of Jesus' life, and in fact, chapters 14 and 15 are devoted to the last 24 hours or so of his earthly life. So to only give 8 verses to the resurrection has always felt completely out-of-whack to me.

But a colleague of mine helped me see it in a different light this year. He believes that Mark focuses so much energy on the crucifixion because that part of the story is done. It's a historical reality

and a theological accomplishment. Jesus has indeed died for us. It's a one-time act that is good for all time. Jesus' death robs sin of all its power over us by God's grace and bridges the gap between God and humanity. The theological term for that is "atonement", best understood as "at-one-ment".

But resurrection is not once and done. Don't get me wrong. I believe Jesus rose from the dead that first easter. I believe he walked out of that tomb alive, and the world was inexorably transformed. It is historical and theological reality. The point I'm making is this: death is a final moment. It's a point on a continuum. But Resurrection is the triumph of life over death, and life is ongoing. Can anyone out there point to a single point on a timeline and say there – that's life! Can you? I can't. I've done hundreds of funerals and never once in all my years has a family said to me "this one moment defines the whole of my loved one's life". Never. Resurrection is the freedom to live. Freedom from the sin the brokenness. Freedom from the fear. Freedom from the things that hold us back.

In my earlier days in ministry in Columbiaville, I had an opportunity several years to participate in a passion play – that's a dramatic re-enactment of Jesus' final week or so. It was an ecumenical effort, so I met a lot of neat people from other churches – people I never would have met otherwise. It was also quite popular with our teenagers, so it was a great way to interact with and support our youth. After doing a couple of years, one of our younger teenagers wanted to get involved – she was probably only 13 or 14, but she'd heard some of the older kids talking about it and thought it sounded kind of cool. She came to all the rehearsals in the basement of another church, laughed and joked with the other kids – it was social thing for her. Until we gathered at the high school for the dress rehearsal. That was the first time, she'd ever seen the whole thing, all put together with the lighting and the music and the costumes. That was the night that it all fell into place for her. The wires in her mind and her heart made the connections that had been forming since her parents started bringing her to church as a toddler, and she accepted Jesus as her savior. She stood there, watching, tears pouring down her face as the story came to life in her life. And as I watched her, a part of me was jealous. The story hadn't been that new, that fresh to me in years. I began to wonder if something was wrong with me that it no longer drove me to tears – what Jesus had done for us in his death and resurrection. I don't mind admitting that I wrestled with that for a quite a while.

Until I realized one day that while Christ's death and resurrection no longer drives me to tears, it still drives me. It still drives me. A song came to my mind as I was preparing for this morning. The lyrics of the last verse are these:

Early morning, April 4.
Shot rings out in the Memphis sky.
Free at last.
They took your life.
They could not take your pride.
In the name of Love;
What more in the name of love?

Those lyrics are from a song that's at least 30-some years old now by the biggest folk band in the world called U2. They reference the assassination of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr, who was shot to death in Memphis 53 years ago this evening.

A year ago January, Morgan Guyton published an article in the United Methodist Insight Magazine. I want to read you the first few sentences of that article. Guyton writes: "I had a unique experience on Martin Luther King Jr. Day this year that I've never had before. I found out that one of my local friends knew Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. personally and worked under him at the very end of

his career when he had shifted into anti-war organizing. My friend shared something that King said to him over and over again that was really convicting to me. He said, "Do not succumb to the disease of cynicism, for it will justify all of your worst instincts." [from Morgan Guyton, <https://um-insight.net/perspectives/dr-king-on-cynicism/>]

That was convicting to me, too. So much so that I keep that quote on a card in my drawer. Because the truth is that as I get older, the single biggest struggle I face personally is the fight against becoming cynical. Watching the news, it's easy to believe that everything is going from bad to worse. Not a day goes by when there isn't conflict, animosity, name-calling, and posturing. I hear about a bill being considered, and my mind thinks to itself: Oh, it'll help people? Well, that'll never pass. Which isn't actually true. Every year, the legislative branch in the US considers upwards of 20,000 pieces of legislation, most of which, do pass and do help people in ways I don't know or understand. Every day, people all across the world – people who don't necessarily agree on things – still help each other, work together, connect in thousands of ways to do good in the world. Just because it isn't reported doesn't mean it isn't happening. When the world around me gets dark, that's when I turn to the Risen Savior. I refuse to find ways to justify my worst instincts. When the world drives me to tears, the resurrection drives me to hope. I have to believe that things can change. I have to believe that we can weather the divisiveness and decadence that is destroying our nation and our planet. My faith drives me to the knowledge that God works in little things and hidden moments and beating hearts, none of which can be seen in glaring spotlight of pop culture today. The human spirit is selfish and greedy and tribal. But it is also resilient and creative and compassionate. All at the same time. The resurrection drives me to hope.

In the gospel lesson from Mark, the young man dressed in a white robe – an angel, obviously – tells the women, "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." Go tell the disciples and Peter. Why is Peter named separately? Isn't he a disciple anymore? I'll tell you what I think. I think Peter believes he's blown it. He denied his Lord, not once but three times. I think Peter believes the worst about himself. His worst instincts have indeed proven justified. He undoubtedly despises himself. He's named separately so that he knows he's included. In spite of all about us that is dark, that is death-warmed-over, that is base and wicked, Jesus sees all that Peter can yet be. Resurrection doesn't just happen to Jesus. It happens to Peter. And to Paul, and to all the others, who go around the world preaching hope. And still, Jesus sees our best, and forever holds out hope that we will strive for better. And all he asks of us is that we will do the same for each other – to see one another with resurrection eyes – eyes of hope.

I want to close this morning with a story told by Jack Riemer of the Houston Chronicle, who attended a concert of famed violinist Itzhak Perlman at Avery Fisher Hall at the Lincoln Center in NYC in November of 1995.

"If you have ever seen Perlman on TV, or been to a Perlman concert, you know that getting on stage is no small achievement for him. He was stricken with polio as a child, and so he has braces on both legs and walks with the aid of two crutches.

"To see him walk across the stage one step at a time, painfully and slowly, is an unforgettable sight. He walks painfully, yet majestically, until he reaches his chair. Then he sits down, slowly puts his crutches on the floor, undoes the clasps on his legs, tucks one foot back and extends the other foot forward. Then he bends down and picks up the violin, puts it under his chin, nods to the conductor and proceeds to play. By now, the audience is used to this ritual. They sit reverently silent through all this until he is ready to play.

"But this time, something went wrong. Jack Riemer writes:

“Just as Perlman finished the first few bars, one of the strings on his violin broke. You could hear it snap it went off like gunfire across the room. There was no mistaking what that sound meant. There was no mistaking what he had to do.

“People who were there that night thought to themselves: ‘He’ll have to get up, put on the clasps again, pick up the crutches and limp his way off stage — to either find another violin or else find another string for this one.’

“But he didn’t. Instead, he sucked in a breath, took off his jacket, rolled up his sleeves, closed his eyes, and then signaled the conductor to begin again. The orchestra began, and he played from where he had left off.

“You could see him modulating, changing, recomposing the piece in his head, his fingers sliding up and down the neck of that violin. At one point, it sounded like he was re-tuning the strings to get new sounds from them that they had never made before.

When he finished, there was an awesome silence in the room for half a moment before applause erupted from every corner of the auditorium.

Now of course, anyone knows that it is impossible to play a symphonic work with just three strings. I know that, and you know that, but that night Itzhak Perlman refused to know that. [adapted from “When to Take the Shirt off Your Back” by Leonard Sweet, www.Sermons.com.]

The thing about resurrection is that it frees us from dead ends. It frees us from meaninglessness. It frees us from limits. The resurrection may not drive me to tears, but it still drives me. It drives me to hope. It drives me to love the broken and the mean and the lost. And it drives me to act, to give of myself, to look for God on the move in this life. It drives me to believe in things that can’t be done. Three strings. Three days.

So to circle back to the start and wrap this up, maybe Mark left his gospel unfinished on purpose. Maybe Mark knew that in the end, the resurrection account is something you record on paper, but something you experience. Maybe it’s up to us to tell the story; to live the story; to experience the story. Maybe the greatest gift Jesus gives us is to be part of the God’s ongoing work that will eventually finish the story. And maybe the question that Mark demands we answer isn’t “so what?” but rather, “now what?”

Christ is risen!

Christ is risen indeed.

Thanks be to God.