

## Easter Day B 2021 Sermon

### **Mark 16:1-8**

*When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint Jesus. 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.*

It is a wonderful blessing to be gathered together once again, in worship, both *last* Sunday **and** today – and, hopefully, from now on! Getting to this point has involved a lot of practical details: developing safety plans and submitting them to our Diocese; marking the pews and the floor for social distancing; setting up livestreaming equipment; and on and on. Last Sunday, I forgot one of those details: I forgot to plug our sound system into the camera, resulting in a livestream that was silent.

For the three women in today’s Gospel reading who go to the tomb early that first Easter morning, there are *also* practical details to take care of – like buying the spices to anoint Jesus’ dead body. And as they approach the tomb early that morning to attend to their grim task, they realize that **they** have forgotten an important detail. “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?” they ask one another. On the **practical** level, it is a *crucial* question; for, as Mark tells us, the stone is very large.

But, on *another* level, as Dr. John Shea points out, the rock is not simply a *physical* rock blocking the entrance to Jesus’ tomb; it is also a **symbol** of what is blocking the women’s understanding of the mystery of Jesus’ death and resurrection. On *this*, **symbolic** level, the women’s question to each other, “Who will roll away the stone from the entrance to the tomb?” becomes, instead, “Who will teach us how to enter into the death and resurrection of Jesus? Who will teach us how to be buried with Christ in order to rise with him?” *That* question will be answered once they enter the tomb. For, the one [whose mission it is to] roll back the rock from their understanding is waiting for them [inside].”

Finding the physical rock already rolled away, the women enter the tomb, and they see a young man in a white robe, sitting there. He is there as a witness and a

guide, to help these faithful women absorb the inexplicable reality of what has just happened, and to help them understand what it means for their own lives. John Shea notes, “The fact that the young man is in the tomb means he has died and was buried with Christ... he is the baptized Christian who understands and lives the path of death and resurrection.” And therefore, he is the perfect witness and guide.

“You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified,” the young man tells the women. “He has been raised; he is not here.” And then, in order that the women don’t just take **his** word for it, the young man invites them to see for themselves. “Look,” he tells them, “there is the place they laid him.” The first step on their journey to understanding is the realization that the tomb is empty. Death does not have the final word.

Then, the young man reminds them of *another* important detail that they, and the other disciples, have forgotten. Three times during Jesus’ ministry (Mark 8:31; 9:30-31; 10:33-34), he had **told** his disciples that he would have to suffer, be killed, and on the third day rise from the dead; and yet, they never understood. Now, the women are **seeing** that three-fold prediction being fulfilled. And yet, *still*, it is hard for them to comprehend.

Finally, the young man sends the women to deliver a message to the other disciples. “Go,” he instructs them, “tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.” (For, you see, following his last supper with his disciples, Jesus had said to them, “after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee” -Mark 14:27-28.)

The young man has now fulfilled his mission. He has shown the women that the tomb is empty; told them that Jesus had been raised from the dead, as Jesus himself had predicted, three times. The young man has done his best to roll away the stone blocking the women’s understanding.

And yet, *despite* all of this, Mark tells us, “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.”

And that is where Mark’s Gospel ends.

What kind of an ending **is** that – leaving us hanging, not knowing what happens next? An empty tomb; the women afraid, astonished, and silent – what kind of an ending is that?

We find an important clue when we recall how Mark’s Gospel *began*. The very first verse of Mark’s Gospel reads: “The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” But many Bible scholars believe that Mark meant this statement to be the *title* of his Gospel, **not** its first verse. In other words, *the*

*whole Gospel of Mark* is only the **beginning** of the good news of Jesus Christ. And if the whole Gospel is only the beginning, then the ending has yet to be written.

The young man in the tomb had said to the women, “tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.” Why Galilee? John Shea writes, “Galilee is the place where it all began; the place of Jesus’ original preaching, teaching, and healing. The following of Jesus is not over. It is beginning again, only this time with the greater understanding that the full life, death, and resurrection of Jesus makes possible.”

My friends, *our* following of Jesus is not over. You and I continually begin again, each day dying to our small self, our ego self, our separate self; and each day rising, more and more, into our larger self, our whole self, who we *truly* are in Christ, members one of another.

My friends, this past year has been difficult for us all, not only in our individual lives, but within our families, community, church community, and nation. Today, **Easter** Day, the resurrected Christ is present, within and among us, as we worship once again in this building – just as we had *before* the sufferings and deaths of this pandemic began. Today, Easter Day, we are reminded that **our** following of Jesus is not over. It is beginning again – but *now* with the fuller understanding that this past year of suffering, death, and new life has taught us!

No one ever *sees* the risen Christ in Mark’s Gospel; because Mark wants us to realize that *we* are meant to **be** the risen Christ to one another, in our own place and our own time. It can be frightening, as the women in our Gospel know; because being the risen Christ to one another means that we have to die to our old, small, familiar selves. And yet, Easter calls us to be the compassion of Christ, the love of Christ, the life of Christ to one another, and to the world.

The ending of Mark’s Gospel leaves us hanging because “The good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” is an open-ended story to which everyone who would follow Christ must add their own, unique and irreplaceable chapter. **We** are a part of the *continuing* story of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. *We* are real-life characters in a Gospel story that **has** no end.

AMEN