

\*Based upon the fact that most early manuscripts of Mark's Gospel end at verse 8, most scholars believe that the remainder of the verses in Chapter 16 were added by the church at a later date in order to complete the story. For this Easter Sunday, we opt to stick with the original ending.

*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 any one, for they were afraid.*

Easter Sunday is such a relief from the darkness of Holy Week. For a week we've been on a journey to the tomb, it is a journey that is familiar to many of us...death that is. This year, in the midst of planning our Tenebrae service of darkness and contemplating the meaning of Good Friday with our Bible study group, I officiated a funeral. As I walked alongside the family in preparing for that service, I realized how routine those steps have become. I sat down and tried to count, and my conservative estimate is that I have officiated about 120 funerals in my ministry. The traditions of death are familiar territory. We notify the loved ones, write the obituary, choose the favorite songs, select the comforting scriptures, pick the burial clothes, find the gravesite, make the plans. Routines. That is how the first Easter morning began.

The women, who by the way, were disciples of Jesus...there were women in the group that followed Jesus around and learned from him and shared ministry with him...the women are up early because there are rituals to perform. Maybe they didn't sleep at all the night before. Maybe they sat, silent, around a table staring vacantly at an empty chair. Maybe as the black night began to streak with the first shades of purple, they rose, one by one, and began to fill their bags with the spices they would need to preserve the body. Maybe, as they stepped out into the chill of early morning and heard the first birds begin to sing, they all looked offended that a song of joy dared to intrude upon their somber purpose. Maybe they stayed silent until the garden of tombs began to emerge on the horizon and one of the women gasped and whispered, "What about the stone? How will we move the stone away?" Maybe the practical one of the bunch said, "We will find a way." I mean, they can't turn back now. What would they do? Go wake the men and ask them to come? No. This is their work...their ritual...their time. They will find a way to find the body of Jesus and perform their rite of burial.

Maybe it is the same woman who gasps a second time when she notices that the stone is already moved...pushed off to the side of the gaping black hole. Fear, no doubt, took hold...what has happened here?

They go looking for Jesus...timidly, I would imagine...they step into the tomb and probably gasp again to find a young man in white sitting there: ""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.

Notice, it isn't a question...You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth...it is a statement...and an interesting one. YOU are looking for Jesus of Nazareth...Jesus, son of Mary and Joseph...Jesus who was once a baby and grew to be a man...Jesus who had a hometown, and favorite childhood stories, and had friends and ate fish and bread and drank wine. You are looking for a human body that was brutally murdered and placed here, in a tomb. He is not here. Jesus of Nazareth. He was there...pointing to a stone slab...that's where they laid him...but he...that murdered human...isn't here.

As if things aren't seeming crazy enough, the young man tells them that Jesus is risen, as he said he would, and that they are to go tell the others to meet him in Galilee. "Go tell," the angel says...and Mark writes: 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.

The end.

That's where he stops. Fear and amazement. Terror. Silence. How brilliant of Mark to understand that is exactly where many of us are tempted to stop...at the part where we run from what we don't understand...where we flee from the places where our traditions and rituals are upended, and we are uncertain what to do next. We are tempted to run from things that we haven't had a hand in...from situations in which we have had no control...from circumstances in which we were not consulted.

We are afraid because this is new territory...this resurrection place where Jesus can't yet be seen. Maybe Mark stops here because Mark wants us to wrestle with hearing the angel in the tomb for ourselves...You are looking for Jesus here...but which Jesus are we looking for?

Are we looking for the dead Jesus of Nazareth or the living Jesus, Son of God?

Are we looking for the Jesus that was, or the Jesus who is and is to come?

Are we looking for the historic Jesus that we have read about, or the

Jesus that still lives and teaches and shepherds and loves?

Are we looking for the Jesus encased in a tomb,

the one who is nailed down, easy to find and understand?

Or the Jesus that walks among us...the Jesus that lives in the sinner we have condemned, the immigrant we have rejected, the sick we have ignored, the prisoner we have locked away, the poor that we have failed to help?

Are we looking for the Jesus who we can claim and anoint in the way of our rituals, or the one is anointed by God and belongs to ALL the world in ways we find challenging and uncomfortable?

You are looking for Jesus...but are you looking for the right Jesus in the right places? Because the Messiah Jesus...the savior of the world Jesus...the good shepherd, lamb of God Jesus...is no longer entombed behind a stone, unreachable because of our weakness.

There is no way we have it in ourselves to approach the living God, it is too heavy of a stone for us...but God moves it...God opens the door, clears the path, and makes Jesus accessible...the right Jesus, that is...the living Jesus that isn't confined to our expectations and understandings.

Mark is toying with us a bit. He wrote his Gospel about 60 years after Jesus' resurrection...he knew that everyone who read it would know that the women didn't really stay silent...yet he chose to end with the story incomplete...maybe because he knew we would still be struggling to complete it. Maybe because he knew we would still be looking for Jesus...and a bit terrified when the one we find isn't what we expect.