

Mark 16:1-8

Easter morning defines Christian faith. *Easter marks the beginning of a new world where nothing is certain, not even death* (Christian Century, p. 421). Since the day of resurrection the church has confessed as its central proclamation that **Christ has died, Christ is Risen and Christ Will Come Again**. Our testimony gives witness to the continuity of the Son of Man's personhood through the time dimensions of past, present and future. Easter morning proclaims the resurrecting power of God that defeats the power of death and issues the power to create life from death. This morning we will hear the gospel narrative about Easter morning from the gospel writer Mark. Of the four Biblical gospel writers he was the first to record the event. As he interpreted it, the tomb was empty save for a linen cloth, divine messenger, and Divine Word. Most Biblical scholars think that Mark wrote somewhere between 50-70 A.D. before the violent military fall of Jerusalem. Because the earliest manuscripts don't include verses 9-20 they also think that Mark ended his gospel at verse 8. That's why the church's lectionary for Mark's account of Easter morning does not include the appearance reports as recorded in verses 9-20.

Mark 16:1-8

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?" But when they looked up, they saw that the stone which was very large, had been rolled away. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed. "Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'" Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

“The Empty Tomb”

... He is not here. Mark 16: 6d

Mark's ending to his gospel is for those of us who have been to the cemetery, feel the finality of death, and know death's power in us. It's for those of us who make the Christian confession of historical faith that, **Christ has died**. It's for those of us who are like Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome, faithful followers of Jesus, who, while fulfilling their religious obligation to the dead, sought a deeper understanding of the resurrecting power of God. Their inquiry into faith began in a down to earth, practical kind of way. They asked one another, **Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the entrance of the tomb?** (In women talk that translates as: If Jesus were alive, he could have done it. But he isn't, so whose got the strength to step up to the plate?) According to Mark, before either Mary or Salome could volunteer for the job, the need to do so went away. When they reached the tomb they discovered an unseen Power had already opened up the grave. Mark records it in this way: **But when they looked up, they saw that the stone which was very large had been rolled away** (Mark 16:4). As Mark understood it, Easter morning was all God's doing. God rolled away the stone. What this means for us is that our human powerlessness in the face of death does not have the last word. The last word is God's. The victory is God's. The

knowledge of it humbled and set the fear of God in the first Christians, just as it does in us today.

Mark's ending is also for those of faith, who stand at the grave in the present, seek Jesus, and long to walk and talk with him again. When the women entered the tomb, the young man dressed in a white robe sitting at the right side to the tomb told them that he knew what they were after: **You seek Jesus who was crucified. He is risen, He is not here.** His words opened up the possibility for Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome that they could once again experience the earthly joy of communion with Jesus. **Christ is risen.** For us, it is the church's witness that proclaims that Christ is alive in the world today, and that we can walk and talk with him too. **"He is going ahead of you,"** the Divine messenger told them. Samuel Wells explained that, *This is a message about the present. God's activity did not stop at the cross, did not stop in the raising of Christ. He is still alive and active, still busy, still going ahead of us, blazing a trail for us to follow. He is going ahead of us. Whatever difficulties lie ahead, he is already meeting them before we do. He was betrayed, tried, persecuted, killed; so may we be. He was raised, so will we be. Our faith is founded in a unique event in the past: "he has been raised." But it is alive in the present: "He is going ahead of you."* (Christian Century, p. 421 April 12, 2000) **Christ is Risen.** Our belief in it doesn't let us become heaven seekers only, but rather it sends us out into

life to embrace, engage, and enjoy it . . . To be, "*in the world but not of it*" . . . like the columnist and author Art Buchwald. When Buchwald was told that he had a terminal illness he said, "I don't have any control over it so I may as well have the time of my life." And he is. He enjoys his conversations with the Hospice staff, he enjoys his breakfast, lunch, and supper, he enjoys his diminishing abilities, he enjoys the thoughts and memories that still come to him. Whether he is a Christian or not, I don't know. But he is a man who lives in light of the resurrection. In a recent CNN newscast he reported having a dream in which he was standing at the railroad station with his ticket to heaven in hand when the announcement came over the loudspeaker that his train had been delayed. Christ is Risen resurrects joy and strength to accept and embrace life, even while we are dying.

And finally, Mark's gospel ending is for those of us who have the recurrent dream that we have the misfortune of getting stuck in the line to heaven in back of Mother Theresa and overhear St. Peter saying to her as he reviews her works of Christian discipleship: Is this all you have? In the empty tomb, the messenger had a word to the women concerning the future. But go and tell Peter and his disciples that he is going ahead of you in Galilee; there you will see him just as he told you. The church says, Christ will come again. Christ will come again to judge

Christians in their faithfulness in following Jesus' way of the cross. It is Mark's way of plunging us back to the beginning of his gospel to re-trace the way in which we have and have not followed Jesus in his way of the cross. To Peter and the disciples, the men who abandoned and denied Jesus, the message, *There you will see him ---* assured them of forgiveness of their sin and gave them a clean slate and new day for following Jesus. For a woman who experienced a near death experience, that translated as re-prioritization of her time and commitments after she got home from the hospital so that she could spend more time with her family. Christ will come again. *There you will see him just as he told you.* There in your continued following of him, God will resurrect new life in you.

Upon hearing that resurrection was for the living as well as the dead, the women of the first Easter morning left the empty tomb in this way: *Trembling and bewildered the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anybody because they were afraid.* Mark's gospel ends on that note. The "implied" *resurrection represents the apocalyptic hope that the blood of the martyrs will be vindicated and the pain of the world, healed, and confirms the call to historical insomnia. This hope is articulated in the following lines taken from a poem by Guatemalan exile Julia Esquivel entitled "They Have Threatened Us with Resurrection"* (Binding the Strong Man, C. Myers p. 408).

They Have Threatened Us With Resurrection

There is something here within us which doesn't let us sleep, which doesn't let us rest, which doesn't stop pounding deep inside, it is the silent, warm weeping of Indian women without their husbands, it is the sad gaze of the children fixed there beyond memory, in the very pupil of our eyes which during sleep, though closed, keep watch with each contraction of the heart in every awakening . . .

What keeps us from sleeping is that they have threatened us with resurrection! Because at each nightfall, though exhausted from the endless inventory of killings since 1954, yet we continue to love life, and do not accept their death!

. . . Because in this marathon of Hope, there are always others to relieve us in bearing the courage necessary to arrive at the goal which lies beyond death . . .

Accompany us then on this vigil and you will know what it is to dream! You will then know how marvelous it is to live threatened with resurrection! To dream awake, to keep watch asleep to live, while dying and to already know oneself resurrected!