

The Terror of The Eternal

Mark 16: 1-8

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It was Saturday night. Not much more than 24 hours earlier Mary, Salome and friends had buried their leader, their teacher, their Lord. All Friday they'd been overwhelmed by the authorities and the crowd that screamed in desire for blood, and got it.

Late Friday afternoon, as the sun was preparing to set and the holy time of Passover was about to begin, and as the crowd evaporated to their homes, the friends had taken Jesus and buried him.

But not with the care and consideration for detail they wanted.

It was too late for that - Sabbath time was coming.

That was Friday.

On Saturday, after sundown, they purchase the supplies to do it right.

With the first hint of dawn and safety on the roads, they meet and head out to the cemetery. Where they discover the incredible event of Easter!

The stone is gone.

The body of Jesus is gone.

They meet the angel -

"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."

Their response?

They panic - and run away, saying nothing to anyone.

At least - that's their first response.

As best as we can tell this is the original ending of the gospel of Mark. What seems to have happened is that in the centuries after Mark first penned the gospel, people who were copying it weren't satisfied with the gospel ending at verse 8, and so made up a variety of endings. The bibles in front of you show two of the most widely copied endings.

It seems that scribes along the years couldn't handle the story stopping with the women panicked, and leaving. And so, they drew on common memory, and the stories shared among believers, to fill in the last details.

I'd like you to stop with me, though, at verse 8.

Can you imagine the panic that the women must have felt?

There's a fear of the unknown bubbling to the surface. And so they run. After everything they've been through over the last while, who can blame them? Warning bells go off in their head.

Grave stone is gone - who moved it?
Body is gone - has there been a thief?
Someone is there - a government spy ready to trap them?
It's all too strange.
What they expected has all been disrupted.
Alarm bells go off in their head. So they run.

There is fear.
But not total fear - there's also a sense that something else has gone on here.
And so Mark tells us - they are seized with amazement, too.

Something tells them,
yes, through the panic, something tells them...
...***There's more here than meets the eye!***

It's huge stuff!
The news was too wonderful and too great to be grasped at once. It blew them away. The women struggle to digest it all, and to figure out how to respond to this huge and holy disruption to everything that they expected to encounter.

The end of verse 8 is actually the place in life where many people find themselves for long periods of time. They hear or read about the Easter events but - hey - this stuff doesn't fit the regular pattern of human experience.

I mean - how many funerals have you attended where the body goes AWOL a few days later? And then someone, an angel apparently, shows up to give an explanation? Would you have fingers left over if you tried to count how many times that has happened to you?

It's not the regular pattern of experience.

So if and when people encounter the Christian message of Easter, they hear about it, scratch their heads, wonder what to make of it.
And often hesitate - which is actually very understandable.

Because, you see, we're dealing with very powerful forces here.
It takes more than a little force to move a huge grave stone.
It takes some sort of power to move around a body -
- and then, if the claim is true that the body has become alive again -
- well!!! What power does it take to bring life to a dead body?

See?

This is **NOT** an event that can be taken for granted.
It is **NOT** something to be treated lightly.

If
 it
 is
 true

then Easter is

NOT

 a mere
 take-it-or-leave-it
 moment in history.

And friends,
 We **BELIEVE!**

We believe that it
 IS TRUE!

We believe that the disruptive events of this early Sunday morning, so many years ago, in a Palestinian graveyard,
 ARE
 TRUE!!

And we are calling each other, and anyone who will listen, to pay attention.
 Pay attention to that eternal power that can reverse death.
 Pay attention to that eternal force which is going to intersect your life.

Pay attention - but do not be afraid.
For while it at first may seem terrifying, it is actually tremendous.
 Because something that we have all come to accept as normal
 something dark and painful
 something that really is NOT normal - not in God's plan, it isn't!
 that something has been disrupted.

Easter is the account of the disruption of death.
 Shaken up and kicked to the side!
 Just like the angel had shoved the grave stone bolder to the side.

Death's unchallenged strangle hold over creation is disrupted.
And the door has been unlocked to grant us entrance to eternal life.

On Friday it seemed as if death had won.
Jesus was lowered into the grave.
And death tried to pin him down for the count.
But it was unable to hold him for the full three days.

Now Sunday has come.
JESUS HAS WON!

His eternal power of life is greater than any power of death.
So, death - be afraid!
Be VERY afraid!!
You have met your match in the Living Jesus.

And people - you who surrender your lives to Jesus, be not afraid.
Don't be afraid AT ALL.
For that eternal power of Jesus has demoted death to nothing more than
a doorkeeper to heaven, into the presence of God
a presence into which all believers will be welcomed by their Saviour.

Death does not have the last word over your eternal existence, believer.
The living, eternal, powerful Jesus does!

And that Jesus calls to you, just as he called to the women and their friends.
Which is the other thing for this morning.

The horror of the past days had divided the Master from his followers;
separated Jesus from his friends.
They had deserted Jesus - gone AWOL.
They had watched the crucifixion from a distance.
They had abandoned him. And now they were alone.

Until the Holy Disruption.

And the word of the angel -
"Go tell the disciples he is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will
see him, just as he told you."

Yes, they abandoned Jesus. But he will **NEVER** abandon them! He calls them to meet with him again. He gives them yet another chance.

Jesus,
completely victorious,
gently begins to gather his scattered and quaking troops.

Here's the great news -

The Living Jesus does not quit on quitters.

He keeps on seeking us out.

He gathers us in.

He goes ahead of us, in fact, clearing the way, preparing our life.

Jesus went to Galilee to prepare the disciples for the rest of their lives and lives' work.

Just as He goes ahead of all believers.

He goes ahead of us into our Galilee, into our future preparing the future way for us.

When something in our life -
our life as an individual,
our life together as a church community
when something in our life falters, or goes wrong,
when apathy threatens or discouragement sets in,
Jesus promises to re-gather us.

He disrupts our failures,
and grants us the grace of new beginnings!

***He is going ahead of you into Galilee...
he is going ahead of you!***

Jesus is going ahead of you, my friend.

The living Jesus - with all his power of life - is going ahead of you.

And he calls to meet with you.

However you feel you may have let him down in the past.

However much you may be feeling that you have wandered away from him.

However little or much you may understand about resurrection and life eternal.

Jesus calls to you as he called to the women.

And the disciples.

And Peter.

Yes, even Christ-denying, big-mouth Peter.
The one who had such great intentions,
and then screwed it up so royally.
Jesus even calls him back!

"Go and tell... Peter."

Someone caught in the grip of his shame and failure.

Till that failure and shame is disrupted by Easter because of the personal holy invitation from Jesus.

Perhaps you can relate to Peter. For whatever reason, you have done an about-face at one point or another in your life, deliberately turning your back on Jesus.

You'd become cynical or bored or busy or just not interested or found it all absurd or.... well, you yourself know the reason best. Maybe it was something that went on for a long time. Maybe it was the faltering for a day or an hour.

Whatever it was you look at it and you're feeling heavy inside.

It's not right. Not good.

You know it, feel bad about it, but it doesn't go away.

Then listen to the words of Mark 16: "Go tell the disciples.... **AND PETER.**"

Go tell the one that hasn't been in church for 15 years.

Go and tell the one who has completely forgotten to pray last year.

Go and tell the one who has carried on business practices that seemed to be a total denial of God.

Tell them - I want to meet with them!

I'll be waiting for them!

In their Galilee - in their home.

I'm waiting.

Jesus is alive, friends.

And waiting - for each one of you!

It took the women a little while to figure it out.

But even here in Mark 16:8, right in that first moment they realize that something huge - and incredibly wonderful has happened.

In short order, say other accounts, they DO respond.

Will you?