

**Easter Sunrise
Mark 16: 1 – 8**

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After listening to the scripture and to one another, I am certain that this thoughtful group, even at 6:30 in the morning, has noticed that the gospel of Mark ends in a most notable way. While all the gospels are notable only Mark ends his gospel before the disciples meet the risen Lord. It is the tomb and not the risen Jesus which remains in view at the gospel's end.

I should note that there is scholarly disagreement about where Mark ends. Some of the manuscripts which we have give the gospel a longer ending where Jesus does appear. Yet, most manuscripts end with the words "they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid."

I have met some people who would argue that because Mark ends short of an encounter with the risen Jesus his gospel gives evidence that the resurrection did not occur. I disagree. I contend, instead, that this account of Jesus' resurrection is no less powerful than the others and more akin to our experience as 21st century Christians. It alone asks us to believe before we've seen, to act before we meet Jesus, and to break the silence of our fear with a choice to make a journey of faith.

In the very early morning, after the sun had risen, Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of James, and Salome went to the tomb with spices that they might anoint him. On the way it dawned on them that the tomb had a large stone rolled in front of it. Even if they worked together, they would not be able to move it. So the question is asked, "Who will roll away the stone?"

Even though they do not know the answer they continue on expecting that something could, something would happen that would allow them to enter in. When they arrived, indeed, the stone had been rolled away.

I think of the stone as being composed of the many arguments we use to not start a journey of faith. I suspect you are familiar with a few of your own. It is seductive to travel other paths than the one that would lead to Jesus. The stone built from those decisions seem awfully heavy indeed. It is difficult to

imagine how shame or inner pain or our unfulfilled desires can move aside that we might enter a new place.

How many are those I've met who have learned the talk of faith but have never allowed God to move aside the stone!

The first step of faith is to believe that something can, something will happen that will allow you to enter into a new realm.

No, that may not be that you find your perfect husband or wife.
That may not be that you are tops in your career.

That may not be that your abusive parent sees the light.
That may not be that the illness you face is removed.

That may not be that you are reconciled to the hurts of your past
Or that you will experience less hurt in the future.

What it means is simply that God will open to you a new realm, a new way of judging what it means to hurt, what it means to face illness, what it means to be single, what it means to be a person of God in a job which has made many something less.

The first step of the Christian faith and all groups based in the Christian faith is to trust God to remove the stone too heavy for you to lift.

Scripture is clear. The stone will be moved away.

Then we can enter in.

And to our surprise, when we enter into the tomb, that which should hold only the dead, there we find life. Inside Jesus' tomb sits a man, a young man, dressed in a white robe.

He says to them who hold the spices meant to anoint the dead, "You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified. He was raised. He is not here."

The women are caught red handed in their disbelief. Understand that Jesus spent a good amount of time teaching about his death and resurrection. To appear at the tomb 3 days after his death, was to put aside Jesus' own teaching, was to disbelieve the one they had trusted, the one they had followed, the one they had loved.

That Jesus of Nazareth was crucified as he said should have meant that he would rise just as he said. So speaks Mark's gospel...

Mark 8: 31 "Then Jesus began to teach them that the Son of Man (the title Jesus uses for himself in the gospels...a title that is most often seen in the book of the prophet Ezekiel) must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed and**after three days he will rise again.**"

Mark 9: 30 "They went on...and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it; for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, "The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him,**and three days after being killed, he will rise again.**"

Mark 10: 33 Jesus says, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death; they will hand him over to the Gentiles; they will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; ...**and after three days he will rise again.**"

It is clear that Jesus, when he spoke of his death, always went on to talk about his resurrection. When Jesus spoke of how he, the Son of Man, was to die, he always goes on to say **after three days... he will rise again.**

So when the young man in white, sitting in the tomb, says "You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified," he establishes the first part of the theorem. Jesus has died in the way he spoke of so that means he has been raised.

If we believe Jesus was sane...

If we think we can trust in Jesus' teachings...

If we are willing to follow the way of Jesus who lived so long ago

Then, even if we haven't seen the resurrected Christ, even if we've not had an experience of Jesus that has knocked us to our knees, even if we don't get how this resurrection thing could work...

We are urged to make the connection. Jesus died as he said. Jesus is not here. It must be as he taught again and again and again... The Son of Man, Jesus, is risen.

Let's return to the man in white. He says, "He has been raised. He is not here. Tell his disciples that he is in Galilee. There you will see him just as he told you."

Here lies the greatest challenge that is unique to Mark's telling of the gospel. Where the other gospels describe in detail how Jesus appears to the disciples who are afraid or have just gone back to their old ways, Mark requires the disciples go to Galilee where, we are told, Jesus waits. Each one must make the journey.

I remember the beginning of my life of faith. Sunday School and church camp gave me an understanding that there was something to turn to. But it wasn't until college, when other paths were leading nowhere, that I made a choice. At that time, if you had asked me, I would have said I doubted whether God really existed, I didn't trust God, I didn't believe in Jesus as Lord/Savior and was angered by those who did. I remember one man on the patio of church evangelizing me...he who believed in the resurrection. I didn't. I felt him pushing me towards something I wasn't yet ready for. My soul was pushing back. He kept coming; he couldn't see me clearly. Then the pastor stepped in. This pastor understood that each of us makes the journey in our own time. See this one man, like so many others, was trying to bring me into the presence of the resurrected Christ and I had yet to allow God to push away the stone.

Ten years would pass before I could speak of my Lord, Jesus Christ. In those ten years I would attend church, first in Orange County and then in Moreno Valley. Ten years of going to every Bible Study that was offered. Ten years of saying "yes" to serving the church wherever I was asked. Ten years of being surrounded by people of faith who treated me with kindness and who helped me start speaking words of faith. In church I finally began to see myself as a person of the resurrection.

If the first step of Christianity is to allow God to push away the stones that separate us from meeting God's messenger...the second step is to become a disciple of Jesus, to learn his teachings, to follow his way. Once we believe him, he will lead us to the resurrection. I don't mean this to become an advertisement...it just is so very clear to me that there is no other place to begin this journey between the empty tomb and the risen Christ than the church. There is no other place in the world where the risen Christ is the head and the people, his body.

Listen, it was impossible for you to roll the stone of your own stuff away...so let's not imagine we can do it for others without the risen Christ. The risen Christ is found in the church.

But what about the silence that ends the gospel of Mark? What about the fact that the women seem to have told no one, seem to have fled out of the story altogether? Where are the disciples? Where is the church?

For Mark, it is enough...

It is enough to know where you begin and where Christ may be found...

It is enough to have met Jesus, to have begun to follow in his ways...

It is enough to take a step, a single step further this day...on your journey of faith.