

March 31, 2024

Easter Sunday

“Now What?”

Mark 16:1-8

The gospel story this morning begins with two women setting out to perform a routine task. These women, along with their companions and good friends have had a most disconcerting week. First they saw Jesus - the one who is to them teacher and healer and leader - welcomed into the city of Jerusalem, only to see the crowd and those closest to him turn on him, and then to witness his excruciating death. Now these two women – these two Marys – are heading toward the tomb to perform the distressing but necessary task of anointing the body of their friend who has died. A difficult task, yes, but a routine one.

Coming to the tomb to complete their task they find not, as they had expected, the heavy stone and the body of their teacher but instead a young man in white, an angel who gives them instructions that the text tells us they are too frightened to repeat.

Although some verses were added later, most scholars agree that the gospel of Mark originally ended here.: "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." Not only does this verse fail to provide proper narrative closure, writes preacher Tom Long, it also lurches to an awkward grammatical stop. A more literal translation would read, "To no one anything they said; afraid they were for..." It is almost as if the author of this gospel of Mark had suddenly been dragged from his writing desk in mid-sentence

Perhaps they were afraid because they realized in seeing the impossibly heavy stone moved easily away, in seeing the empty space where the dead body they had come to anoint was supposed to have been should have been that Jesus really was who he said he was. He was not only a teacher or a healer or a leader and their friend, but the Christ. And if that is true, and they really are going to follow him, it means the Marys' lives are going to be anything but routine from now on.

So, for a while they said nothing, as this new reality took root in their souls. But they couldn't keep silent forever. We know that, because although those two first witnesses said nothing to anyone, here you are on Easter morning twenty centuries later and half a world away, telling their story. It was a story too powerful, too holy, and too good to keep silent.

Happy Easter! This is your story now! And that awkward ending? It's not the end. It's just the beginning.