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Mark 16:1-8 (Easter)

## WHY WAIT?

We all love a strong ending to a story. It doesn't even have to be a *good* ending to a story, just as long as it is a strong ending. There is nothing more annoying than watching a movie or reading a novel, getting caught up in the story line, only to have it fizzle out with a weak ending. By most standards, Mark's Gospel account of the resurrection is a weak ending. Mark's version of the Resurrection has no actual encounter with the risen Christ. The women come to the tomb in the morning but they only encounter a young man, possibly an angelic figure, who *tells* them that Jesus is resurrected. In all the other three gospels, the writers have us see and experience the risen Jesus on that Easter day. And all the other three gospel versions of the Resurrection end with the disciples filled with joyous emotions. Sure, the followers are also bewildered and astonished, but they are also filled with the emotions of joy and excitement--something amazing is going on. We get none of these positive emotions in Mark's version. The women who leave the tomb in Mark's version of the story aren't jumping and skipping and leaping with joy. Instead, they flee, they *flee* in terror and say nothing to anyone for they were afraid.

Now this is a disappointing ending to be sure. And it clearly bothered early Christians because some other writers came along and added more verses to the story--those paragraphs you can find in your Bibles after verse 8. But most scholars believe that Mark's original conclusion to his gospel ended at verse 8 of chapter 16--with no sighting of the resurrected Jesus and the women running away in terror. It's such a weak ending to the story we've been following since

the first chapter of Mark and through Jesus' ministry, his teachings and miracles, his escalating conflicts, the betrayal of his followers, his agonizing death. We've been waiting for and expecting a much stronger ending, a victorious ending, a resurrected Christ. We've all gathered here today to hear the triumphant story of the Resurrection. But Mark's account, with some unknown guy telling the women that Jesus goes ahead of them to Galilee and the women running off in terror, this version hardly seems like the Resurrection even occurred. All the other gospels end with a *proper* Resurrection story. But not Mark.

On the other hand, maybe Mark had a somewhat different take on the Resurrection. We've become accustomed to anticipating the Resurrection as the climatic end to the story of Jesus' life. But we notice something interesting going on in Mark's gospel. When the young man in the tomb tells the women about Jesus' resurrection, he says that "Jesus has been raised up," using a Greek word that we see occur over and over again throughout the gospel. Way back at the beginning of Mark's gospel, in chapter 1, Jesus heals Peter's mother-in-law who was very ill. We are told he "took her by the hand and lifted her up," using that same Greek word that means "raised up." In other words, a resurrection takes place. Later, Jesus heals a paralyzed man, saying to him, "Stand up, take your mat and go to your home," using the very same Greek word. Another resurrection. The same Greek word appears again when Jesus acts with compassion to heal on the Sabbath day a man with a disabled hand, breaking the religious laws, saying to him, "Come forward" or "rise up." When a little girl falls ill and dies, Jesus comes to her home and takes her by the hand and says, "Little girl, get up!" using the same Greek word. A resurrected life is given to this child. And when a little boy falls to the ground in a seizure, Jesus takes his hand and "lifted him up," we are told, using the same word. The boy is healed. He is given new life.

We thought that the Resurrection was something that happened *to* Jesus at the end of the gospel stories. But the Resurrection does not wait to show up until the end of Mark's gospel. Resurrection is taking place all throughout the gospel story, as God's kingdom breaks into people's lives with transforming power. Mark shows us that the Resurrection is the very essence of Jesus' ministry, so why wait until the end of the gospel for it to take place?

Why wait? That is a question put to us today. Christians have understood the Resurrection as something we anticipate taking place when we die. Jesus was raised from the dead and so will we be when we die. And that is certainly part of what we celebrate today--that God triumphs even over the grave. But why wait until we die to know the resurrected life? What a shame, what an absolute waste if we wait for the resurrection to happen to us when we die. Mark shows us that Jesus didn't wait for his death to offer the gift of resurrection. He was impatient to share this gift, to raise people to new life, to restore the sick and disabled back into a society that excluded them, to lift people with his love and forgiveness.

And some of the people Jesus most desired to resurrect were his own disciples--his followers. They were so eager to be part of the new kingdom they thought Jesus would usher in: to enjoy the status and power and privileges they thought Jesus' kingdom would bring. But Jesus kept trying to teach them that his kingdom was about service and sacrifice: that the last and least regarded in this world would be first in God's kingdom, that those who would be great would act as servants to others, that loving one's neighbor was the most important thing a person could do with their life. In other words, Jesus tried to teach them that the way to rise up, the way to reach the pinnacle of life, is found in heading down in service and humility. And Jesus so wanted to give this gift of a resurrected life to his followers.

Jesus is still trying to resurrect his followers today--you and me. For we are stuck in ways of living that have entombed us. If we look at the world around us today, much of the behaviors we see and we at times engage in could fall into a few categories: behaviors centered around grabbing hold of all we can; behaviors focused on holding tight to what we have; behaviors connected to lashing out in anger; behaviors related to turning inward in fear. And all of these take us to the tomb. Jesus offers us a resurrected life--not a life free from hardship, but a life rooted in meaning and purpose and the love of God.

So why wait? What are you waiting for? When we are filled with anger is when we most need resurrection. When we are afraid is when we most need resurrection. When we are ashamed of ourselves is when we most need resurrection. When we love our material goods is when we most need resurrection. When our lives and behaviors feel out of control is when we most need resurrection. When we have been injured by others or when we have done the injuring is when we most need resurrection. Jesus has left the tomb and invites us to follow him. A transformed life awaits us. What are we waiting for? What keeps you from taking those steps and undertaking the journey out of your tomb?

The resurrected Jesus that we find in Mark's gospel seems just as impatient as the living Jesus because he doesn't stick around the tomb. Tombs are for the dead. But Jesus is about offering life. Remember how the young man tells the women that Jesus "goes ahead of you to Galilee"? Galilee was the disciples' home town. Galilee was where their ordinary lives were lived out. Jesus doesn't hang around the tomb in Mark's gospel because the risen Jesus was impatient to offer us resurrection out there in our ordinary lives. "There you will see him," the young man tells us. There you will see him.

And here's another interesting element: Jesus is so impatient to get resurrection going that he doesn't even wait to see the disciples in Galilee before he is offering his resurrection gift. Remember that odd statement that the young man in the tomb says to the women? He instructs them to "go tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee." Now why does this guy add *and Peter*--go tell his disciples *and Peter*? Peter was one of the disciples, so why did he name Peter specifically? But then we recall Peter's profound disgrace--how it was Peter, who after swearing he would stand by Jesus through thick and thin, denied knowing Jesus not once, not twice, but three times. He totally failed Jesus. Some would judge Peter to be a weak, cowardly man after such a performance, a man worthy of contempt and disdain. How could anyone recover from such a disgrace?

But to this man burdened by the disgrace of his actions, Jesus speaks resurrection words of forgiveness and love through the angelic man sitting in the tomb. "Go tell his disciples *and Peter* that he is going ahead of you." Jesus doesn't wait until he sees Peter in Galilee. He offers that grace right there in the tomb. Right away Jesus lifts Peter's disgrace. Peter is named, and Peter is forgiven, and Peter is offered resurrection. And so are you and I. Whatever our disgrace, whatever our pain, whatever our struggle, Jesus speaks our name and offers us the gift of love, forgiveness, and new life--today, and tomorrow, and every day after that.

I'm going to read that sentence--"go tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you"--and instead of the name "Peter" I am going to pause and I invite you to say aloud your own name because the same gift of resurrection has been given to you. "Go tell his disciples and \_\_\_\_\_ that he is going ahead of you."

The real ending to Mark's unusual resurrection story rests on how it will unfold in your life and mine.