

The Resurrection World

Mark 16:1-8

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Of the four resurrection stories from the Bible, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, Mark's story is the most mysterious. It's the oldest of the stories too, the first. And, people didn't like it. Typical, there's always a critic.

Mark's doing something new. When he's writing, 40 years after the life of Jesus, there had been collections of Jesus' teachings and faith statements of Jesus crucifixion and resurrection, but no one had put the two together. No one had really addressed the controversy in story form of how Jesus could have been crucified and still be the Messiah that everyone had hoped for. Mark walks right into this challenge and starts writing.

He pours his heart and soul into this gospel, telling the story of Jesus and the good news of the Realm of God, this world where everyone is valued and everyone has enough. Mark tells how the Realm of God, needs a completely different kind of king. One who doesn't lord it over others, but serves others. Mark makes the case that it makes complete sense for Jesus to walk in to the heart of the beast with no weapons at all. Evil and violence will not be conquered with more evil and violence. This evil will only be conquered by the self-giving love of God. Jesus enters Jerusalem, challenges the authorities by telling them how God wants the world to be. And the authorities crucify him. This had been a scandal. The Messiah wasn't supposed to be crucified. But Mark says, "how could it be any other way? The Realm of God is about self-giving. It makes sense that the King of this realm would give of himself completely, be faithful to God and this good news to the end, and trust that God's love in the midst of this good news would never die, no matter what.

Mark writes and writes and writes, get through the passion narrative and now it's time for the big ending, resurrection. Time to hold all the stories of resurrection that the church has held for these forty years, and to put his own twist on it. I can imagine Mark thinking, "It has to be simple and clean, it has to be exciting and joyful but it has to have an edge to it. Resurrection is kind of scary. It's showing us a different

world, one where we see how powerful love is. It invites us to participate in this love that changes things. Resurrection is never really complete, it's always happening. How can I write this final chapter so we feel how resurrection unsettles things, so we feel like we've taken the first step into a new world, where love will keep showing us how it's more powerful than we had imagined?

So Mark tells of the women going to the tomb, wondering how they will roll away the stone. They get there and the stone's rolled away, the tomb is empty except for a young man in white. He tells them Jesus has been raised, and he says, "Go, tell the disciples to go to Galilee and you will see him there." The women leave, amazed but terrified. So terrified that they flee from the tomb, just as the disciples deserted Jesus and fled. Before evil was too powerful and dangerous, now love is so powerful it feels dangerous. The women don't speak to anyone, end of gospel.

Mark finishes the story and he's so excited. He hands the manuscript to friends in the church for them to read. Mark tells the story in Easter worship from beginning to end. The congregation listens with interest and finally the last chapter, resurrection and the story is done. The congregation is silent, no applause. Finally someone yells out, "well that's not right!" (sigh) Mark is crushed. Then someone else says, "well the middle's good but couldn't you put a birth story at the beginning. Everyone likes babies." And someone else says, "who cares about the beginning, it's the end that's all wrong. The women have to tell somebody, they can't be that afraid. They have to tell somebody or see Jesus or it's not finished.

The early church didn't like the end of Mark's gospel. Matthew and Luke include virtually all of Mark's gospel in theirs, adding pieces to the story here and there, but they completely change the end. If you look in your Bibles you'll see that Mark has alternate endings. As people were copying the manuscript, they got to the end, said "this isn't right," then wrote a few more paragraphs and sent it off.

But as we read this resurrection story, it's important to hear it on its own terms. It's important for us to trust Mark and to believe that Mark had reasons for writing what he did and leaving out what he did. Mark

wants us to feel the joy of the story but Mark also wants us to feel the surprising power of God. We feel and see the power of the evil in the Passion narrative we see the death-dealing untouchable power of Rome and the religious authorities. The disciples flee in the face of it. Now we see that God's love is even stronger, and the women flee, startled by this overwhelming power.

Mark wants the story to be incomplete. If a story is complete, we might think of it as over. Resurrection isn't over, resurrection never ends. It happens, it will always be happening. Mark wants us to step into a resurrection world, where we see things differently, where we see things as they truly are. In the resurrection world, sin and evil and powers beyond our control do their damage, but no matter what they do, they can't stop the love of God. It always comes back to life, it always takes another form and expands, it always resists and redeems and outlasts. In the resurrection world, we see that this power of love is where we should place our trust, and we see that this power is our hope and we see that this power will change us. And that is always a bit scary.

If the resurrection story isn't complete, if resurrection is still happening, then we are invited to look at our world through the resurrection. This story has something to say about those powers beyond our control. For the women and the disciples, that power was Rome. The cross was a Roman tool of torture and intimidation. Rome occupied Israel, and they controlled the religious authorities too. The women were used to the sins of Rome, they saw them do their damage, and as they followed Jesus they experienced their death dealing ways. In our world there are other powers beyond our control: the economy, empire-like corporations that are too big to fall, corruption on Wall Street, corruption in Washington, rising health costs, rising college costs, rising inequality and violence here and war in distant lands.

Mark invites us to look into the resurrection world and see things differently and see things as they truly are. All of these powers will do their damage, but they will never wipe out God's power of love. If the cross was the end of the story, then layoffs, and foreclosures and despair and never ending war would be the end of the story we're living now. In the resurrection world we see that love remains, pulling us towards a better future for all. Creating space for new opportunities for individuals

and nations: new opportunities for good work that meets a need; new opportunities to reorder our common life as a people. God's love will always spring back to life. God's love will always resist injustice. God's love will always work to redeem and reconcile and restore. And as soon as we take that first step into the resurrection world, we will not only see God's love we will participate in it. It will call us to live the way of Jesus, at odds with our culture, at odds with what is normal, at odds with the powers that are so big and do so much harm. We will be called to spread love where we can, to resist injustice where we can, to be a healing balm and a reconciling people where we can. This is hopeful, this is scary. This is resurrection.

If the resurrection story isn't complete, if resurrection is still happening, then forgiveness and grace are still happening. As we take those steps into the resurrection world, we see a God who loves us for who we are, not what we do. Though we see ourselves in the betrayal and desertion of the disciples, in the fear of the authorities, and the primal cries of the crowd, God does not abandon the disciples, or the authorities or the crowd, God remains through crucifixion to resurrection.

And God remains with us, inviting us into the resurrection world, where we can trust that there is always love for us without condition, where love is always redeeming, restoring, healing and offering us new life. This love will change us. This love wants reconciliation in our lives. It wants reconciliation not only with our true selves, but with our loved ones, and with our neighbors, and those that are strangers, the strange ones. This love will send us toward one another to engage our deepest hurts and our deepest fears. This is hopeful, this is scary. This is resurrection.

If the resurrection story isn't complete, if resurrection is still happening, then God's love is still stronger than death. As we look into the resurrection world, we see things differently. We see them as they are. Through resurrection we see a love that can never end, a love that holds us forever. Here we begin to trust that nothing separates us from the love of God, and little by little we let go of our ultimate fear. As we walk further into this new world, and place more of our trust here, we find comfort and we find some relief. Now we can be honest about beginnings and endings. Now we can stop denying and avoiding, and

instead think intentionally about how we use the time we're given in this life, about how we are being called to live right now. This love that takes our fear away, changes things. It will change us and how we live our lives. It may well encourage us to take risks that previously we could never have imagined being foolish enough to take. It's hopeful, it's scary. It's resurrection happening.

Resurrection is never complete. It is always happening, and will always be happening. That's the way God is, showing us again and again that love is what is most powerful. Love will not die, love will it stop. This love will always be active and moving, working for justice and reconciliation and freedom and joy in the face of fear. And it won't leave us alone either. It will always be pulling us toward a better life and a better world, even if the road is challenging. Anything less wouldn't be true to our story. Our journey must go through Jerusalem, but the cross doesn't stop us. Mark knows that. The women who visit the tomb know that. They also know that it's God's love that gets us past the cross to the joy on the other side. And for this we say, Alleluia, thanks be to God.

Amen.