

FEAR AND TREMBLING

ISAIAH 25:6-9

MARK 16:1-8

EASTER 2018

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MARK'S PICTURE OF JESUS' CRUCIFIXION ON GOOD FRIDAY CASTS LONG SHADOWS.

Some of them go backwards in time almost to Jesus' baptism. They even darken his picture of the Resurrection on Easter Sunday. For Mark the emphasis is on the Crucified one who gave his life as a ransom for many. He died and was buried. And only then did resurrection occur. On that first Easter Sunday, the cross cast long shadows.

Three women emerge from those shadows in the darkness before dawn, arriving at Jesus' grave just as the sun crawls over Mt.Olivet. They are hurrying because they know by now Jesus' body will have started to decay. Soon the stench will be unbearable. Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome have brought all the spices they could lay their hands on. So desperate

are they to get the work done, that they have forgotten the enormous stone which seals Jesus' tomb. At the last minute they begin to wonder how they will move it.

Peter, the so-called rock, will be of no help with the stone. He and the rest of the men are in hiding, no doubt still asleep; O they excel at sleeping. No, the women are on their own.

OR ARE THEY?

As they approach the tomb, now bathed in the golden sunlight of early morning, they see that the stone has been moved-they know not how or why. Their steps slow; haltingly, they enter the tomb. They sniff the air, no smell, how can that be?

As their eyes adjust to the gloom of the sepulcher, they see a form, but not a dead one. It's alive. It speaks- and they are terrified, frozen in their tracks. A young man in a white robe addresses them: "Don't be startled. I know why **you** are here, but **he** is not here. The one whom men crucified, God has raised. **Go and tell** the disciples,

especially Peter, that Jesus is on his way to Galilee as he told you. There you will see him."

THE PANICKED WOMEN TURN AND RUN.

Dead bodies they can cope with; resurrected ones scare them senseless. They believe many things about God, but that He could or would actually raise the dead, here and now- that is not in their credo. The women can handle death. They are familiar with death. Dead is dead. The dead don't move. The dead don't go back to Galilee. What in the world is going on here? They thought they knew God and knew Jesus, but now their world had been turned upside down.

THE YOUNG MAN COMMANDED THEM TO GO AND TELL.

BUT, their voices are paralyzed, the women are stunned speechless. Mark tells us that ***they said nothing to anyone***. They were as silent as the grave they had just fled. The bravery of these women which we

were about to celebrate, dissolves. The disciples had fled the crucified Lord; they are fleeing the Risen one.

And here Mark's Gospel ends. The women had been commanded to spread the good news of the resurrection, but in the end, they were not up to the task.

As I said, Mark's is a dark picture of the Resurrection of Jesus. It vindicates Jesus but condemns those called to follow him. Perhaps that is why the Church prefers John's account of the resurrection, even during Mark's year.

**SO WHAT CAN WE SEE IN THE DARK SHADOWS OF
MARK'S ACCOUNT OF THAT FIRST EASTER SUNDAY?
HOW CAN WE MAKE ANY SENSE OF IT?**

We could do what the early church did. We could add on some endings.

- One found in some copies of his gospel says "But they reported briefly to Peter and those with him as they had been told. And after this Jesus sent out by means of them, from east to west, the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation."

Doesn't sound much like the prose of Mark who wrote the rest of the Gospel.

- Another longer ending cobbles together endings from other Gospels; this is the ending which appears in the King James Bible.

Or we could follow N.T. Wright who believes the true ending was lost. Then it would be up to us to write our own ending, guessing at what Mark may have written.

BUT WHAT IF MARK ACTUALLY INTENDED TO END HIS STORY THIS WAY?

Why might he have done it? He could have been affirming that God will raise His Son and thereby save the world, though all disciples prove faithless, fearful, and silent. ***Without our aid He did us make; without our aid he will us save.*** God is faithful and will work His purpose out no matter what-even in spite of us. No matter how dark the shadows, there is light. No matter how bleak the outlook, there is hope.

There is another possibility. Mark was the leader of a persecuted church. Christians were being hauled before magistrates, imprisoned, tortured, and killed. If one was a Christian, it was prudent to be one in private. If one was a Christian, it was prudent to be a silent, to say nothing to anyone.

Perhaps Mark hopes his congregation will be unsatisfied with this ending. Perhaps Mark hopes someone will stand up and say, "Wait a minute. God has done something marvelous for Jesus, something completely without precedent. God has vindicated him, declared him innocent of blasphemy and sedition. Jesus has conquered death. God has overturned the worst human beings can do. This news must be shouted from the housetops." To which Mark can then reply, "Exactly, so why are you silent and afraid. Match the courage of Jesus and proclaim the Gospel". Prove yourselves more faithful than his original followers.

FOR MARK, RESURRECTION DEMANDS RESPONSE.

The women were prepared to anoint a crucified Messiah. They were not prepared to follow a Resurrected Lord. If Jesus is dead, they anoint his body and go home. Their work is done. If Jesus is alive, they must take up their cross and follow him whither he goes. This is why they are afraid.

Resurrection demands our response. We must be faithful to the one who gave his life for ours. We must match his courage. We must hear his voice and heed his word. We must open our lives to the power of the resurrection and not settle for one shaped by the finality of death.

- We must not be private and silent Christians.
- Our faith must leave the confines of this Sanctuary.
- Our living must reflect faith, hope, and love.
- We must struggle against the hopelessness and cynicism of the wisdom of the world.
 - The world desperately needs to hear the good news that death is not the end.

- That evil will not ultimately be victorious.
- That love will have the last word.
- That God will triumph and one day rule on earth as He does in heaven, the place where there is not sin or death. Because Christ has risen we can and must look to the future with confidence.

We must embrace the foolishness of the Gospel. We dare not remain silent. We must shout from the rooftops, "He is not here. He is risen! Alleluia!"