

REFLECTIONS



EASTER

Mark 16:1-8

When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint Jesus. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. They had been saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?” When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, “Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.” 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.

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SEIZED BY TERROR AND AMAZEMENT

by
Norm Wright

The Gospel lessons from the lectionary for this Easter Sunday offers two options, the more familiar one from the Gospel of John in which Mary Magdalene is seeking Jesus whose body she believed had been removed from the tomb and one from the Gospel of Mark, which I have posted above. Each of the gospels vary to some degree in their telling of the resurrection of Jesus. My favorite account of this mysterious event is the one from the Gospel of Mark.

Mark's Gospel, considered to be the earliest Gospel, is noteworthy for having two versions of the resurrection. The earliest known manuscripts of Mark stops at the end of today's lesson, with the women leaving the tomb both terrorized and amazed by what they encountered. It is this shorter version that prompts one to imagine and ponder what went through the minds of these women when they encountered the empty tomb and told that Jesus had been raised.

What I like about this particular version is that it doesn't attempt to give any explanation for what happened. We are left with their reaction to something they could not explain; a reaction to the wholly other, that had no reference in this life; a reaction that the theologian and philosopher, Rudolf Otto described as a "*mysterium tremendum et fascinans*," a mystery that both "terrifies and fascinates." (Rudolph Otto in "The Idea of the Holy"). In fact, so shocking was the mystery that confronted the women that Mark says they told no one about it, and yet here we are talking about it, which means that at some point they did what they were told to do.

It is easy to lose the mind-blowing edginess of their experience that first Easter. In fact, it is near impossible to comprehend it. Ironically or perhaps predictably, one of the ways that exemplifies our difficulty with comprehending it is to treat it as if it was a one-off historical event like Christmas. Jesus may be the reason for these seasons, but that is pretty much where the importance of these holy days ends for most people, including Christians.

Please don't get me wrong. I'm no Grinch when it comes to celebrating the seasons of Christmas and Easter. Our house is decked out in lights, has the obligatory tree, Santa Clauses, Gnomes, along with a smattering of angels, and a nativity Scentsy Pot at Christmas. These are replaced at Easter with Easter eggs and Easter rabbits. I'm not advocating that we don't celebrate life during these holidays. In fact, love of life is indeed part of these celebrations.

For those of us who follow Jesus, we find in the celebrations of these holy events profound implications for our lives and for our world. For us, the story of Jesus' birth, the Incarnation, contains an answer to the question, "Why are we here?" We see in the Christmas story that our lives are meant to be like Jesus, incarnations of God's presence in this world; to be loved by God, to love God, and to love and recognize God's presence in the being of others. After two thousand years, however, the story of Christmas has lost much of its amazement. Many don't give it the thought it deserves or take the time to ponder the edginess contained in its telling.

On the other hand, the resurrection of Jesus, as depicted in the story of the women encountering Jesus's empty tomb and being told he had been raised, ultimately gives way to the more rhetorical question, "Why not?" "Why" implies an assumption that there is answer, not only to why something happened. "Why not" dismisses a need for any explanation; conveying a sense of abandonment to whatever is occurring or has occurred. Frequently, this rhetorical question emerges as a profound response to a life-changing experience.

Jesus' death was tremendously terrifying and tragic. It really doesn't make sense to any of us today. His crucifixion remains a terrifying tragedy. It was something that none of his disciples were expecting, even though Jesus tried to prep them for that possibility. What ends up more terrifying and disturbing, however, is Jesus' empty tomb; terrifying and disturbing in the sense that in our concrete understanding of the our world where dead means dead, death is shown to be permeable, that death gives way to life.

We need to reclaim the edginess and the terror of the empty tomb that has the power to shake us out of the complacency of our concrete views of this life. We need to encounter with these women the terror of the unexplainable and unimaginable which shakes us from the the primal temptation to know as God knows and instead allow ourselves to be lost in the abandonment and the amazement of why not? Why not resurrection? Why not turning our sorrows into joy? Why not to God's immeasurable, unending, and life-giving love for all?

On this Easter Day, let the edginess of Jesus' resurrection sink in and allow the "why" of the crucifixion give way to the "why not" of the empty tomb.

JESUS LIVES!

***Jesus lives! thy terror now can no longer, death, appall us;
Jesus lives!by this we know thou, O grave, canst not enthrall us,
Alleluia!***

***Jesus live! Our hearts know well nought from us, his love shall sever;
life nor death, nor powers of hell tear us from his keeping every.
Alleluia!***

(Christian Furchtegott Gellert 1715-1769)