

"Is this any way to report a Resurrection?"

Mark 16:1-8;

Acts 10:34-43; Ps. 118:1-2, 14-24

Chapel Lane Presbyterian Church

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When it comes to reporting the story of the resurrection, Mark isn't very satisfying, is he? Frankly, he leaves a bit to be desired. Compared with the other Gospels, Mark's report is woefully incomplete.

The ending to his Gospel seems to leave out some of the best parts. There are no resurrection appearances of Jesus, no stories about him walking through closed doors and speaking with the disciples. Jesus doesn't walk with two of his disciples on the road to Emmaus. By comparison with the other Gospels, Mark's report seems incomplete, as though there ought to be a better ending to the story. This is no way to report a RESURRECTION!

The Bible contains 4 Gospels, 4 stories of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Chronologically, Mark was written first. The others came later. And maybe it was in response to the abruptness of Mark's ending that Matthew, Luke and John each record other experiences of the disciples with their risen Lord, to give a more complete, a more thorough report.

But even with these other reports we still get variations, differences of details that, if we were to focus too closely on them, might lead us to question the truth of the entire story. While each Gospel story may be different in its details, one detail is complete and consistent throughout. Jesus Christ who was crucified, died and was buried, is now alive and out of the tomb - resurrected by the Power of God!

This is amazing news - news that is hard to report. Who is going to believe it? What kind of response might one expect to such news?

The women show up, surprised to see the stone rolled away, startled to find someone dressed in white who announces the news and tells them to spread the word that Jesus will meet them in Galilee.

But instead of reporting, they rush out of the tomb, terrified and silent. It's hardly a captivating ending. It's almost as if Mark got called away abruptly, pen in hand. In Greek, the last line reads as if the Stars Wars character Yoda is speaking: "To no one anything they said; afraid they were for..."

Mark's ending may seem strange and abrupt, but maybe Mark's ending is sounding a note of honesty. There are still no heroes at the tomb. Fear would be a very honest reaction to the angel and the empty tomb.

Bruce Larson tells a story in his book titled Living beyond our Fears about a Yugoslavian Judge who made the mistake of reaching up out of the bath tub to turn on a light.

His poor wife found his sprawled body in the tub.

He was pronounced dead and put into a crypt. But during the middle of the night he came to, saw where he was, and went over to the guard - who ran off terrified!

The Judge was worried about how he should contact his wife. He decided to phone her. But he barely got out the words, "Darling, it's me!" when she screamed and fainted.

He tried the homes of several friends and they thought they were seeing a Ghost! Finally, he called a friend in a distant city who hadn't

heard he had died and had him make the calls and spread the news so that others wouldn't be frightened out of their wits.

There is fear in the thought that one who is dead could come back to life. Many of the classic horror movies bank on this plot twist to give their stories an extra measure of suspense and terror.

The women at the tomb expect to find a dead body to anoint. They can deal with that, in spite of their grief. But how are they to react to an empty tomb, an angel and the news that Jesus is Risen? Their first response is FEAR.

And why not? Afterall, they were among the disciples who had deserted Jesus in his hour of need, just a few days earlier. If Jesus was back from the dead, what would he be like? How would he deal with the failures of his faithless followers?

Isn't it interesting that the angel says: "Go and tell his disciples AND PETER, that Jesus is going ahead of them to Galilee"? Peter, the one who had denied his Lord three times is specifically invited to the reunion with the Lord.

Is he going to get his for denying Jesus? What's going to happen to the rest of them? With so many unknowns, Fear would not be an unreasonable response.

But what else is at work here? What else might give rise to a first reaction of fear? Jesus who was put to death by the government and the religious leaders of the day was now raised, vindicated by the power of God. And, if God had done that, then the world as they knew it was upside down and nothing would ever be the same again.

Nothing is secure, nothing is nailed down. Jesus is raised and God is on the loose, on the move!

Given time, I imagine the disciples could have come to terms with Jesus' death. They would have moved on with their lives and gotten over their grief. Everything ends in death, after all...death of one kind or another.

But could they deal with Jesus' life - - with his resurrection presence here and now? We can adapt much easier to God's absence than to God's presence. That is a fearful prospect, to be sure.

The joyous message in our songs and our celebration of Easter 2009 bypasses the honest first reaction of fear. I think it is right that Mark records the fear before the joy. For, if Jesus is raised, then nothing is for certain in the world as we have come to know it.

The old ending called DEATH has been rewritten and a new and better ending is available to all who put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

For the believer, Death is not the extinguishing of a light with darkness rushing in. Rather, it is the setting aside of a candle because the light of the dawn has come. The darkness is no more.

God is not only "with us". God in Christ is "For Us." God is on the side of his people, on the side of life and hope and love.

This is the story of faith that continues to move us, and motivate us and fill us with joy . . . and fear. Because, in this resurrection report we are not merely observers, we are full participants.

God has had the last word, but the story continues to be written and reported and we are called to be a part of it. Mark draws us in, you

and me, to be participants in the story. The more complete report on the resurrection we are looking for is the report that has you and me in mind. The story continues - the story of the Church of Jesus Christ that continues to live and move and have its being in him.

This is the Church that has always been called to set aside its fears, especially in fearful times, and remember the foundation of its life and its faith: the Joy of the Resurrection as it continues to encounter Jesus in its daily life.

With our economy in a shambles, retirement savings gone up in smoke, military loved ones deployed far away, shootings in otherwise serene settings, storms and tornadoes and earthquakes shaking us down to the very foundations, health issues that leave us wondering where to turn or what could possibly go wrong next, we live in fearful, desperate times.

But it is in times just like these that the message of resurrection hope has particular power. To know that even in times like these God has a hold of us and will not let us go, will not let us fall, will not leave us to our own devices, will not leave us in despair and alone without a future or faith.

The words: "Fear Not!" ring out and echo from the walls of the empty tomb into the center of our empty lives, filling us with something we didn't expect to encounter: JOY!

Won't you be a part of this story? Won't you allow the Risen Christ to draw you in and lead you out to serve him with - yes, some fear, because we cannot say for sure just where we will be led, - but also with inexpressible joy, because Christ is alive, and because he lives, we too shall live!?

THANKS BE TO GOD!