

**The Reverend Marjo Anderson**

**B: The Resurrection of Our Lord / Easter Sunday**  
**Acts 10:34-43, 1 Corinthians 15:1-11, Mark 16:1-8**

**31 March 2024**  
**Salem, Bridgeport**

**“The Space Between”**

*<sup>8</sup>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.*

And that’s where Mark’s story of Jesus ends – with grief-stricken women finding an empty tomb, being given words of hope that could not possibly believe, fleeing in amazement and terror, and saying nothing to anyone because they were afraid.

How many of you like that ending?

Well, if you don’t like it, you are in good company,

because at least 2 other people were so upset by Mark’s ending that they added their own – so if you look in your Bibles, you’ll see that there are likely 2 alternate “endings”, but those were added later, by people who could not bear how Mark ended his account.

In the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, someone added these words,

*“But they reported briefly to Peter and those with him all that they had been told. And after this, Jesus himself ... sent out by means of them, from east to west, the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation.”*

And since some didn’t think even that was enough,

in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, someone added what we now see as verses 9-20, which tell of Jesus’ appearances to Mary Magdalene, 2 disciples, and then the 11, the Great Commission declaring that those who believe & are baptized will be saved and those who don’t believe will be condemned, and which picture Jesus taken to heaven and sitting at the right hand of God.

But that is NOT how Mark ended his story. The other 3 gospels include such stories, but Mark does not. And I, for one, am glad that he doesn’t.

I’m glad because, in a strange way, I think Mark is the most relevant gospel for our time – the most relevant, and arguably, the most honest.

It’s the most honest and relevant because, let’s face it, it describes the space in which we live – that space between despair & hope, between doubt & belief, between promise & fulfillment.

*“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’ body].”*

Those words seem so mundane, so mediocre, so meaningless.

*But can you imagine what those women were feeling?*

*They had been following Jesus for years, supporting him and his disciples in every way they could. Jesus had changed their lives.*

*He had given them a hope that their future would be different than their past, that they would be set free from the oppression they suffered*

*both as Jews under Roman rule, and as women under a patriarchal system.*

*They had dared to dream of a day when everything in their daily lives would be different.*

*They had had faith in Jesus and in his promises to them.*

*And then, Jesus had been betrayed and arrested and accused and convicted and sentenced to death by crucifixion. And he had died.*

*And with his death, ALL of their faith had fled, all of their hope had been hijacked, and all their dreams had died. Nothing had changed.*

*It was as if everything they had experienced over the last 3 years had simply disappeared.*

*They were depressed, dejected, despondent, desolated, and despairing.*

*There seemed to be no point in going on.*

*And yet, life had not stopped. It was going on just as if nothing had happened.*

*They were women, women who relied on each other, and women for whom work was waiting.*

Perhaps you have been through such a situation –  
struck down by grief and fear so crushing and paralyzing,  
that it seems there is absolutely no reason to get out of bed in the morning.  
And yet, the world is not paralyzed –  
the earth keeps rotating around the sun & spinning on its axis, the sun comes up, it's another day,  
and there are things that the rest of the world is counting on you to do,  
and so you drag yourself out of bed to do what needs to be done.

*Imagine what it was like to be one of those women.  
None of them spoke. They just began their slow walk to that gorgeous garden with its terrifying tomb.  
That was when one of them stopped in her tracks, and utters two words: The tomb!  
And the others immediately understand.  
The tomb was sealed with that huge stone. There was no way they would be able to move it.  
And not one of them had thought to make arrangements for anyone to do it for them.  
Stupid of them. But then, they weren't exactly thinking straight.  
Well, they were almost there. Might as well go on. Maybe there would be someone around to help.*

You may know what that is like, too—you manage to drag yourself out of bed & through the haze & fog of grief,  
like one sleepwalking in the dark, you begin to do what must be done,  
and then you run into an obstacle that seems immovable.  
But you just keep moving, because if you stop, you may never start again.  
*But when the women got there, they discovered that the stone had already been moved back.  
Maybe one of the other women had brought her husband or sons? That must be it.  
So without thinking anything more, they entered.  
It wasn't one of the other women! Or their husbands or sons.  
It was a man sitting there—a young, very fit looking man—and someone they had never seen before. A stranger.  
This was alarming.  
And then, as if reading their minds, the man said, “Don't be alarmed”- which of course they were.  
He continued, “you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified....” – which of course they were.*

And isn't that also where we sometimes find ourselves?  
walking through the darkness of depression and dejection, desolation and despair,  
looking for Jesus, the one who offered the light of laughter and love, liberation and life?  
*...the stranger was still speaking, “He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him.”  
Their eyes followed where his hand pointed, and sure enough, Jesus was GONE!*

And haven't we, too, felt caught in that space in between –  
having heard the words of hope and promise, “he has been raised”,  
but seeing only that he is not here and the place where we expected to find him, empty.

*And before they could even respond, the man continued,  
“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.”  
Raised? Not here? Gone? Gone ahead? Gone ahead to Galilee? They would see him?*

And here is the promise for those 3 women and for us: “...he is going ahead of you ... and you will see him...”

The reason this gospel is for us in our time and place is because it's where we live.  
The other gospels have Jesus appearing – in the flesh –  
to Mary Magdalene, the other women, 2 disciples on the road to Emmaus, to the 12,  
and to 500 followers – so they got to see what we have only heard about.  
But Mark stops his gospel at the place in which these 3 woman have only heard,  
so in a way, that is where we are – having heard that Jesus has been raised,  
but not having seen his raised body with our own physical, natural eyes.

So at that point the women are in that space that we so often find ourselves in – in that space between – between death and life, between despair and hope, between fear and faith, between promise and fulfillment.

*Mark ends his story with the women hearing the promise,*

*but being seized by both terror & amazement, & fleeing, too afraid to say anything to anyone.*

And what that says to me is that it is okay for us to be in that same space –

having heard the promise, knowing that we should believe, wishing that we could believe,  
and yet filled with guilt and doubt and fear, praying that we would believe.

Mark's gospel tells us that it is perfectly okay to be in that space between,

because as we keep on going, we will one day find ourselves in a different space.

Why? because the place where Mark stops is NOT the end of the story, is it? Of course not.

The other gospels tell us that the women were not silent forever.

They ended up doing exactly what that strange white-robed man in the tomb had told them to do:

they went and told his disciples and Peter that Jesus was going ahead of them to Galilee  
and there they would see him, just as he had told them.

And Jesus does exactly what he had told them – he fulfills his promise – & appears to them, too.

And then they, in turn, tell others.

In our first reading today from the 10<sup>th</sup> chapter of Acts we hear Peter's testimony

then in our third reading from the 15<sup>th</sup> chapter of 1 Corinthians, we hear Paul's,  
and down through the ages, for 2000 years, it has been the same.

Mark tells us through the voice of the stranger in the tomb,

that no matter where we are going, Jesus has gone on ahead of us.

Have friends abandoned you? Think of the 12 and know Jesus has been there before you

Has someone you love betrayed you? Think of Judas and know Jesus has been there.

Have you been unjustly condemned or convicted?

Think of the religious authorities and the civil government and know Jesus has been there.

Have you suffered pain in your body?

Think of the beatings and nails and the agonizing death and know that Jesus has been there.

Have you despaired?

Think of Jesus' words, "My God, why have you forsaken me?" and know Jesus has been there.

No matter what you are going through, Jesus has not only gone through it, too,

he has come out on the other side, victorious.

We live in a continual cycle of promise, seeming disappointment, and then surprising fulfillment.

Every time we make it through a tough time, it is because God has shown up to fulfill a promise.

And we rejoice! And then the next time, we find ourselves doubting again, until God shows up again.

But that's just life – and Mark confirms that.

While we experience joy when the promise is first given, and again when the promise is fulfilled,

most of our lives are lived in that in between space.

For even when we like those women walk in that way of discouragement and despair,

God has already been at work, rolling away the stone, and raising Jesus from the dead,  
and if we keep going, we will see Jesus exactly where and when he intends.

Mark leaves his story at the place where we all are – that space between.

Yes, after the promise there has been death and grief, and doubt and fear,

but even though Mark's story stops in that space,

the story of the women and of every Christian since continues.

Yes, despite God's promises to us, we will face all kinds of challenges from within and without,

but in the midst of the darkness,

God is still at work, and will get us through one challenge after another.

No matter what you are experiencing, know that you are simply in that temporary space between.

God has promised to bring us from darkness to light, from fear to faith, from despair to hope & from death to life.

God has promised and God will fulfill those promise. All we have to do is hold on

while we live between promise and fulfillment – in that space between. Amen