

Trinity Ev. Lutheran Church
Brillion, WI

Easter
April 8, 2012

Mark 16:1-8

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?" But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed. "Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.' " Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

It was a few years ago now when the hit HBO series *The Sopranos* ended. I never watched the show myself, but I know how it ended. The screen went dark. And the series ended. People were mad. Wow, were they angry. I read about it in article after article and comment after comment. People expected closure from plot lines. They wanted to know what happened to characters. And then the screen just goes dark. Nobody knows what happened. It was a vicious cliffhanger. It left all the big questions unanswered and people unfulfilled.

The beauty of an ending like that is that it sparks intense thought and discussion if not with other people at least internally. Writers end on cliffhangers to enhance the internal and external discussion of the reader. They do it on purpose. They do it to get the listener where they need to go.

That's what's happening in the Gospel of Mark. Remember the Gospels are factual and they are 100% true, but they are facts written with a purpose. They are didactic. You might say they are sermonic. So the way the facts are laid out help us see what the writer is hoping to accomplish in us. We're going to notice in Mark today that he leaves us with a cliffhanger. He leaves us with unanswered questions and he does it all on purpose. He's taking us on a spiritual journey to get us where the Holy Spirit wants us to go. He wants us to reimagine everything we think we know about the world.

So it was early on Sunday morning when three women head off as the sun was rising to Jesus' tomb. They have a goal in mind. They're thinking, "Jesus' body was rushed into burial before the Sabbath began. We need to bury him right." It bugged them that Jesus hadn't been buried well. I mean it really bugged them. This was a very emotional issue for them. It was emotional to the point that they didn't even bother to think through the logistics of their effort. It was only as they got closer to the

tomb that it occurred to them, “Ya know, there is a huge stone between us and the body. Who’s going to roll it away?” Good question, ladies. Good question.

Now notice something important here. These ladies are approaching the tomb with one massive assumption based upon their experience and everything they thought they knew about the world. Did you catch what their assumption was? They assumed Jesus was dead. It never occurred to them that Jesus might be alive. Not once. They are utterly convinced at this point that Jesus is dead. They bought spices based on that assumption. They get up early based on that assumption. They head to the tomb based on that assumption. They assume that Jesus is dead.

And that’s understandable. It really is. They had a model in their heads about how the world works. It was based upon on this fundamental belief: death rules the world. That’s the model or paradigm that they thought was in effect. People live for a time. Then they die and we never see them conscious in the flesh. Never. Ever. Again. That’s the model.

Everything in their immediate experience confirmed that for them. Animals live and then they die. Forever. Plants lives and then they die forever. Husbands live and then they die. Forever. And so they knew that Jesus had lived and then just like everyone and everything else ever to grace the earth he also died. Forever. They had this completely understandable model in their head.

All of this is understandable to us. At least, it should be. We live with the same apparent realities. Our inner unbeliever comes imbedded with the same fundamental belief: death rules the world. And our experience has only impressed that truth on us.

I’ve told this story to a lot of you here at Trinity by now, but I think it’s worth telling again. I’ll never forget walking up to my grandpa’s casket – grandpa who taught me to ski, fish, split wood, who came to my basketball games. I think you’re getting the picture. There in front of me was his body. I’ll never forget how frozen he looked and how completely inanimate he was and how that moment wracked me with sadness and fear. Grandpa Bourman was dead. And from everything that I could see and everything I’d seen in this world. I was never going to see him again. Ever.

Ok. I know I’m being depressing on Easter. But we can’t really get the Holy Spirit’s point in this story unless we really get inside the heads of these women. The point is that these women had death and its reality firmly implanted in their minds as the way of the world.

But there’s something else here that we need to understand about the way our minds work. When a paradigm or model is set, then it is really set. It is so set that we tend to throw out data that we think will threaten the way we think.

Let me give you an example. Let's say you believe that we are experiencing climate change. When we have a cold and snowy winter, like we did last year, then you believe that data represents an anomaly. It's not going to change the way you think about climate change. On the other hand, if you believe that the idea of climate change is something made up by scientists with some kind of agenda, then you'll look at our 80 degrees days in March as some kind of anomaly or unexplainable weather pattern. You won't let it threaten the paradigm in your mind. And the point is that neither group will let the data change their position. They both believe in their models of reality and that's the end of it.

That explains the rest of the story. The women are confronted with a new data set. They see that the huge stone has been rolled away. There's a young man in a white robe pointing out that Jesus isn't there and telling them he has risen. The data is threatening their paradigm so they throw out the data. You may ask, "Why didn't they give the data a second look? How come they didn't think about it a little more?" And the answer is that they didn't think at all. They felt. And their feelings led them back to their experience and the model they had in their head that death rules. So watch what they do. Here's Mark's devastating report: **"Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid."** (v. 8) And that's the end of the Gospel for today. Absolutely devastating, isn't it? Look at the emotional state of the women. They are emotional train wrecks. Mark uses a word for their emotional state that literally means, "ecstatic." The idea is that they were literally out of the minds. They were numb. Fear was paralyzing them. And then that emotional state took over their bodies. They had what's called a psychosomatic response. That means that they physically had tremors racing through their bodies. What's happening here? Their overwhelming fears triggered a fight or flight response for the women and they all chose flight. And, again, that's the devastating, cliffhanger, all kinds of questions left ending to this Gospel for today. Instead of rejoicing in the resurrection, these women are frightened; overwhelmed by it; and flee from it. What are we to do with that? We are to think about it. We are to wrestle with it. That's what cliffhangers are for and that's what the Holy Spirit wants to happen.

And the place to start is to go back and take a look at everything the women failed to process. We have to look at the biblical evidence. We start with the huge rock. It had been rolled away. Somebody wanted the contents of the tomb or lack thereof to be known to the world. Then there's the young man in the white robe sitting there. He's strategically placed. Again, somebody wanted the contents of the tomb or the lack thereof to be known to the world. Then the young man points out, "Jesus is not here. Look around and you'll notice there is no body here." And then the messenger made an appointment with the disciples. He said, "You'll get a meeting with Jesus in Galilee. He's heading there ahead of you right now." The rock was moved. An angel was there. Jesus was not. An appointment to meet with Jesus was set.

This data set can only be explained by a new paradigm, a new model, a new world order. And getting our minds around this new resurrection reality is going to

require a total reinvention of how we think. It means that we have to toss out everything we thought we knew about the world. It means reimagining from top to bottom the way that life really works here. And that's why Mark leaves us with a cliffhanger. He's saying to us, "Don't suffer the same initial fate as those women. Don't look at the data set and be so overwhelmed by the new paradigm that it triggers a fight or flight response and totally miss the reality of the resurrection." Mark is saying, "Take the time to process what you've seen. Sift through the data. Realize that Jesus' resurrection demands a new paradigm. It demands a new model in your mind. It means that it's time to reimagine your world based upon Jesus' resurrection."

I asked a number of Trinity members to do that over the past few weeks. Each of them took the time they needed to reimagine their world based upon the reality of Jesus' resurrection. Check it out in the video.

Easter means to you that death isn't in charge anymore. It means that the paradigm where you live a short life and then die forever is wrong. It means that it's time to imagine a new world order. Imagine a world where death has no power and resurrection is the rule. Imagine a world where Jesus – not death – is king. Imagine a world where life begins at your baptism and has no true ending. Ever. Imagine a world where cancer is a gift because it speeds you to life with your resurrected Jesus. Imagine a world where fear of death gets readily converted into the rock solid Christian hope of a better, more glorious, immortal, perfect, resurrected human body. Imagine a world based on the new model of Jesus' resurrection. Imagine it. Base your life on it. Base your soul on it. Because that's the reality we have. And that's what Easter means to you. Happy Easter everyone! Amen.