

Easter in the Ordinary
Mark 16:1-8
Easter Morning
4 April 2021
sermon preached by Rev. Jessica McCrae

“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.” Such a strange place to end isn’t it? You would think that Mark would end on a more upbeat note, like the other gospels. But he didn’t. There have been alternate endings added – a longer and a shorter version; but they weren’t the original. No, Mark ended with that verse I just read. You would think that Mark would want to share the fact that the women got over their fear and that word spread about all that they saw and all that they felt. But Mark doesn’t take such liberties, and for that you have to appreciate him. He reported the story as he heard it (remember, Mark himself was not there on that first Easter morning), and he left the rest open for interpretation, open for response.

I really like Mark’s account because it doesn’t assume that as people of faith, or as people seeking faith, we need to reach a place of instant acceptance, of instant understanding. I really like Mark because he seems to be in tune with the real human condition, with

the fact that it takes a huge adjustment in our understanding make sense of this story – or to accept that it will never make sense, but to open ourselves to an experience of faith, an experience of the Risen Christ anyway. He seems to reassure us, in his omissions, that it takes time for faith to grow, it takes time to let go of our terror and our apprehension to take those steps toward welcoming those things that seem incomprehensible, that stretch far beyond what is plainly in front of us into a mysterious realm where life and hope prevail, despite the worst that life can hand us. It takes time. And Mark, kind, compassionate Mark, gives us that time. And that is a gift. Not only on a day like today, but for all the days of our faith journey.

Because chances are over time your ideas of God and Jesus and faith have changed, drastically. Maybe there was a time when you saw God as a protective, or angered, grandfather type. Or there were times when you questioned where God was, when you struggled and felt distanced from God. There have probably been times when you raged at God because you were so hurt by the world, when gave thanks to God and cried out to God for help, even if you aren't a praying type. But maybe you came to a point where you realized that even if you don't have all the answers about God you

can still *experience* God. If you are anything like me, as life continued and more and more water went under that proverbial bridge you maybe realized that more and more Good Fridays were drifting into your life too. And hopefully, on the other side of those you began to see more and more Easter mornings coming into your life. More and more new life, new beginnings, more and more hope. Maybe, if you are anything like me, you began to see that new life was growing in you, that these stories of Jesus, are stories that are played out, over and over again, in your own life, in all our lives. Maybe you began to see God even in the things that are more “everyday” than mysterious.

Maybe you will come, or have come, to a place of faith where you don't have to necessarily understand how it happened – how that first Easter morning happened - to know that *somehow* it happened, that somehow when things were their darkest and most desperate God came into the midst of something as ordinary, as human as fear and death, and the sun rose again and that tomb was empty. Somehow God's love came, life and hope came, and the story went on and the adventure continued. Somehow it happened then and it happens today; every day in our lives – this thing we call Easter

morning – God’s love and hope, God’s incredible transformative power, is looking for cracks to break through into whatever darkness happens to be surrounding us. That is what Easter is all about. That is the incredible gift of new life, of hope, then and now.

And maybe that is why you are here ... at the edge of the empty tomb with me, wondering how on earth you could ever tell this story, everything you feel, to anyone else. You are looking for a little hope, a little new life yourself. But you can’t even imagine where it would begin, especially now, especially today.

You’d be in very good company.

The women who came to that tomb that day had no idea there would be more of the story left to tell. They thought the story was over, they couldn’t have imagined where new life would begin in their grief. They didn’t come with hope, with expectation. They came only heartsick with grief. Death wasn’t welcome, but it also wasn’t some new thing. They came to the tomb that morning and they knew what they were supposed to do – tend to dead things, not welcome new life. Resurrection – new life - was something entirely out of their realm of experience. It was an entirely new thing – not expected, not planned for - and it scared the wits out of them. They were not

psychologically prepared, they didn't know how to tell this story, they didn't know this story. And unfortunately too many of us don't either. We know about death and challenges and obstacles. We've even come to expect death and disappointment; that a certain number of our dreams and goals will not materialize. We could say that they've died, but we usually express our disappointment with expressions like, "Keep calm and carry on" or "Nothing lasts forever." We don't welcome such defeats, but we accept that nobody's life is free from them. And it's true. But how many of us have come to expect hope, too. Because maybe, just maybe the story isn't over, maybe we need to learn to tell, to live, the rest of it.

Because Easter gives us another perspective on all of that disappointment and defeat; Easter is not only about one man's escape from the grave, it is also about the victory of God's love over the death-in-life experiences of our existence. And that comes to us through Jesus. Easter means that Jesus is not just remembered; he is *experienced*. We have a Jesus who is alive. That means that he comes to deal not just with our after-death circumstances, but with in-life circumstances as well. We can meet Christ in the experience of living, we can meet Christ in those moments when we are hurting and

grieving and beaten down and realize that the story isn't finished, that even though things may not have turned out the way we wanted, the story isn't finished. It doesn't mean of course that all of our dreams come true. But it does mean that we stand in a different relationship to them, pulled forward by hope rather than dragged down by despair. That is what it means to be an Easter people, that is what it means to be a person of faith. And that is good and welcome news for us today, in this pandemic, in this world turned upside down, in this time of fear and grief. Today, we are pulled forward by hope, today we are pulled up by the incredible love of God, today new life is breathed into our tiredness, our frustration, our despair because today Christ defeats death and reminds us that our story is not over.

Mark's original ending not only gives us the time we may need to wrestle with our fears and wrap our head around all that is, happening, but Mark also tells us is that the story is left for us to continue telling. Easter gives us a chance to start the telling, to have some say over how this incredible adventure of Easter morning, the adventure that not only belongs to the women at the tomb but to us as well, will impact our lives. His abrupt and ragged ending leaves it to us to decide how the story will come out. We get to tell an

extended ending. We could write that the idea of a living Lord is just too weird to get our minds around. We could write that it has nothing to do with us or our life experiences (though I doubt that is true). Or we could begin our part of the story with something like “I had doubts, a lot of doubts. I have been feeling so frustrated and anxious and beaten down and couldn’t quite see the road ahead. But then something began to change. I couldn’t believe it at first, that this new thing could be happening in my life. But then I opened my heart and my mind just a little, and this hope, this love, this God came into my life and tomorrow suddenly seemed different, a sun began to rise on a distant horizon and I began to see colours I had never even imagined. I began to feel hope, slowly at first, but stronger now. I feel alive again, and I want to respond, I want to share this hope, this sense of joy in the midst of fear, in the midst of loneliness, in the midst of this life. I want to do something, to live in ways that reflects this hope in the darker corners that others may feel trapped in, because, well, I know what that fear feels like, and I know that isn’t the end of the story...”

Easter is the note of joy upon which the rest of our narrative can be built. Do not be alarmed, he is not here but is Risen. Try not

to be afraid, but know, if you are that it is totally understandable. The best adventures always start with a little bit of terror. Tell that part of the story too. From here on, the telling is yours to do. How will this Easter story unfold for you?

The sun has risen, a new day has dawned and the adventure is just beginning. Thanks be to God.