

<sup>1</sup>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]. <sup>2</sup>And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. <sup>3</sup>They had been saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" <sup>4</sup>When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. <sup>5</sup>As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. <sup>6</sup>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. <sup>7</sup>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." <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.

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Think of a time when news of some sort reached you, and your emotions that arose from hearing that news were so strong that it took you time to wrap your mind around this new reality. This may have been tragic news, like a sudden death. I suppose people who live around Baltimore had such an experience when they woke up on Tuesday to learn of the bridge collapse. Yet, the experience of needing time to process the emotions of an event can result from good news, too: a proposal of marriage, a lottery win, a surprise reunion, and the list can go on. I had an experience like that eight years ago. Ginger and I had to get up early for work at our two separate congregations, and unbeknownst to me, she took a pregnancy test that morning... and it was positive. Did I mention that the day this occurred was Easter morning 2016? As pastors, Ginger and I already had all kinds of things to wrap our minds around on that day, and suddenly the amazing and terrifying emotions of this news took precedence... and we could tell no one. I remember that when I both returned home that afternoon, we went for a walk in our neighborhood. My memory is

a little hazy, but the conversation revolved around the question, “What is going on?” Could the test be faulty? No way could this play out on Easter? Could we be pregnant? “What is going on?”

The women who went to Jesus’ tomb early the first day of the week must have had a similar experience. Mark’s gospel tells us the emotional rollercoaster they experienced. The scene is set with them still in a state of grief, and as they approach the tomb they express their concern about the stone that will inevitably prevent them from anointing the body of Jesus. They find the stone rolled back, and inside is no body of Jesus, only a young man in a white robe. Mark says they are “alarmed.” He tells them that Jesus has been raised. They should go tell the disciples and Jesus is going ahead of them to Galilee. “There you will see him, just as he told you,” the messenger says. They fled from that place, for “terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.”

The end. We are left with these women grappling with the emotions of this news, and that is it. The vast consensus among scholars is that this was Mark’s original stopping point. The oldest manuscripts all end here. You can imagine early readers of this gospel being dissatisfied with this ending: Jesus doesn’t even make an appearance! So decades later a couple of extra endings were tacked on to satisfy peoples’ longing for Mark’s gospel to have a more sufficient ending.

Why are we left with these emotions as the culmination of the story? Alarm, terror, amazement, fear. “Amazement” sounds like the only good one of the lot. Yet the Greek word here is *ekstasis*. We get “ecstasy” from it, but what the word Greek means is “beyond or outside yourself.” It can be used to describe someone’s extreme excitement, but it also can mean that someone was in shock, or a trance-like state of mind. That understanding sits better with alarm, terror, and fear. The story ends with the first witnesses still afraid and unable to wrap their minds around the emotions of this news. They are told that Jesus will be encountered, but in Galilee. That is a two day walk for someone in good shape. “What is going on?” they must be thinking. “How did the young man roll away the stone?” “What was he doing in there?” “How could Jesus be alive?” “If we go to Galilee, can we expect to encounter Jesus there?”

Mark didn’t forget to put a suitable ending on his gospel. He ended the gospel at this point – with the women wrestling with the emotions of this news – because he knew that state of mind is

where so many of his readers find themselves. If they were given the gospel to read, they likely had already heard the story of Jesus to some extent. Yet, they rightfully had their questions, and they rightfully had their doubts. So if you are here this morning with your own questions and your own doubts about it all, you are in good company. Make yourself at home.

The theory goes that the later endings to Mark's gospel were tacked on to the end because this original ending was deemed unsuitable. Well, Mark's ending is very suitable for people who are unsure about this resurrection business. This ending is suitable for people who find that, day in and day out, life is an odd pairing of fear and possibility; that life is an awkward balance between those two. I even believe that Mark wanted this ending to have a word for those people who hear the Easter story, yet look around at the world and say, "What's changed?" Why are we still fighting wars? Why are there still hostages and expendable civilian lives in conflicts? Why is it that our society and our families are so divided that we can't even reach agreement on what is reality anymore? Why hasn't anything changed?

Mark seeks to speak to those of us who are plagued with those questions and who carry doubts. So Mark composes an ending where the reader is left to depend on the prior words about his death and resurrection, where the reader is left to believe that since we're hearing it, the women must have eventually spoken about that early morning, where the reader is left with the intriguing possibility of an empty tomb, and where the reader hears a promise that Jesus can be encountered in Galilee. Galilee... the place where most of Jesus' ministry took place. Galilee... where outcasts were given a welcome. Galilee... where those who were hungry were fed. Galilee... where those who needed wholeness in life were given it.

Where is your Galilee? Where in your life has there been shaming and ostracizing? Where in your life is there a place where nourishment is needed? Where in your life are you not whole, where peace and shalom are not yet manifest? Go there, Mark encourages, because those are the places where you can encounter the risen Jesus.

Mark could have written more in gospel, choosing to include more resurrection accounts. A prevailing theory, though, among those who are literary scholars of this gospel is that this isn't the "narrative end" of Mark's gospel. Rather, this is the middle. The theory is that Mark intended the

reader to be caught in the same emotions of alarm, terror, shock, and fear by the time they reached the end. Then the reader would have to start reading the gospel a second time, in order for the reader to see how the resurrected Jesus encounters the reader in their own life.

Where is your Galilee? Is it some suffering, or a failure, or the experience of divorce? Jesus can meet you there. Is your Galilee the family divisions and squabbles? Is your Galilee the substance use disorder or your dark thoughts? Jesus can meet you there. Is your Galilee a spiritual blindness, or a clinging to privilege, or apathy, or an inner righteous urge for some equity and justice in this world? All of these things can have us in an awkward balance of fear and possibility, and it is there that Jesus can meet us.

The experience of the women that early first-day of the week is something we all experience in life: alarm, terror, shock, fear. And we cry out “What is going on?” Even in that uncertainty, we can live the experience of the resurrection by leaning into this possibility of new life. Doubt is not antithetical to hope. Doubt is not antithetical to faith. It is simply asking – in that state of terror and shock – “What is going on?” The church has asked that for centuries. The possibility of resurrection draws us into a community that lives out the middle of this gospel story in the hope and witness of Christ’s new life. That hope changes lives. That hope stirs our hearts to sing; to pull out all the stops on the organ and say, “Let’s do this. Let’s make a joyful noise together, because wherever our Galilees are, the risen Jesus meets us there.”

Alleluia and Amen.