

Kerrisdale Presbyterian Church

“Trembling, Bewildered, and Afraid”

First preached at Kerrisdale Presbyterian April 8, 2012. Revised for St. Andrew’s.

Scripture: Mark 16:1-8

Hymns: Jesus Christ is risen today 243

April 12, 2020

Easter Sunday

Rev. Steve Filyk

“Trembling and bewildered,
the women went out and fled from the tomb.
They said nothing to anyone,
because they were afraid.”ⁱ

Easter morning contains an event so astonishing
so amazing, so utterly terrifying
that a group of female friends are struck silent.

Ever encounter a group of women struck silent?
Let’s be equal opportunity here...
Can you recall a single time
When a group of men had nothing to say?

On Easter morning something unusual has certainly happened.

If you’ve been following along in the Gospel of Mark
you’ll realise that today is not the first time
that we’ve encountered today’s group of women:
Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome.

Flip back just one chapter
and you’ll read that the same group
kept vigil through Jesus’ arrest and execution.

They watched his body being raised on a cross.

They watched his lifeless corpse being pulled down.

‘Were you there when they crucified my Lord’
the song asks?

These women were there.

Yes, they watched from a distance.

But while the other disciples had scattered, they remained.

In today’s reading they’ve come back after sunrise.

They’ve come to anoint Jesus’ body
and pay their last respects.

We can only imagine how emotionally drained,
how physically exhausted they must have been
after all they had been through.

I’ve watched families keep vigil
with their sick and suffering ones.
It takes an incredible toll on those who stand by.

Coming back Sunday morning
These women must have been glad
that the terrible week had ended

Jesus was dead.
He couldn’t be tortured any further.

But I wonder if they were also relieved
That Jesus’ mission had ended.

Jesus' mission was compelling...

All this focus on healing and restoration.

Jesus spoke of new beginnings to a woman
who had already been through five husbands.

But joining up with Jesus
was an invitation to a difficult journey.
Jesus refused to take the easy path
and he demanded the same from his followers:

"If anyone would come after me,
he must deny himself,
and take up his cross and follow me." Jesus said.ⁱⁱ

I can't help but wonder
if these women found solace
in the end of Jesus' suffering.

And I can't help but imagine
that they were relieved
to be going back to life as normal.

Maybe there was an upside to Jesus being dead.

Well if the women had been considering this 'upside'
it wasn't for too long.

As they return to Jesus' grave early Sunday morning
they notice that the large stone
that had sealed the tomb's entrance
has been moved.

Then they see a young man
dressed in a white robe
standing nearby.

Before they get any words out
he offers them a gracious greeting:
"Don't be alarmed".

"You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified.
He has risen! He is not here.
See the place where they laid him."ⁱⁱⁱ

This messenger then tells the trembling women
to share the news with the rest of the disciples;
That this risen Jesus has gone ahead of them to Galilee
that they will soon see Jesus for themselves.

But message received isn't message delivered.
This news is simply too hard to digest.

The women flee the graveyard,
And they keep this story to themselves.

These women had come to Jesus' tomb
to get some closure,
so they could move on with their living.

But at Jesus' tomb they are confronted
with something they had never expected,
never in their wildest dreams.

PAUSE

Every Easter we are confronted with the same incredible news,
the same amazing story:
"He has risen! He is not here."^{iv}

And every Easter we
try to tame the terror,
and disarm the amazement

In the church we domesticate it with metaphors about new beginnings.
Our culture has turned it into a celebration of chocolate
And family.

But imagine the coffin lid flinging open
grandma sitting bolt upright
and asking for a beer?

What would that do to the serene send-off?
Could you really water that story down?

The truth is this story in Mark is not about Cadbury's Easter eggs
Or blossoming Spring flowers.

This story is about a dead man who has left his grave.

And not just any dead man
but one who spoke of God as Father
and who his witnesses call God's Son.

Maybe terror and amazement and fear
is the most appropriate response.^v

PAUSE

There are two endings to Mark's Gospel

The shorter ending,
The one that is regarded as the most authentic,
Doesn't say what happens
after the women are given the message about Jesus.

The story drops off, literally.

Mark's composition, his Gospel
ends with a preposition: grammatical treason.

The Bible in Basic English

preserves what is smoothed over in other versions:

"And they went out quickly from the place,
because fear and great wonder had come on them:
and they said nothing to anyone,
because they were full of fear that..."^{vi}

They were full of fear that... what?

That what Jesus promised was true?

That life would never get back to normal?

And what are we so afraid of in the story of Jesus' resurrection?

Why are we so afraid to linger in this story?

Why it is so hard to listen to me

And so easy to think about Easter brunch?

Could it be that we afraid that there might be more to life

than building a career and making a few dollars,

than sailing the seven seas

and watching our kids and grandkids grow up...

PAUSE

When my first daughter Isobel was born

one of the first things we did was take a photo

of our newly minted family

and sent it to everyone we knew.

A colleague responded:

'I can see the fear in your eyes!'

There was fear in my eyes.

I had just journeyed with Amy

through 18 hours of agonising labor.

I had just witnessed a miracle

I knew our lives would never be the same.

Ten and a half years later

I can tell you that life with children
is harder, more complicated, more difficult
than life without them.

And yet having children,

Is one of the best choices I've ever made.

PAUSE

On Easter Sunday, Jesus' resurrection changes everything.

So are you willing to take a chance
and follow the risen Savior?

A journey with Jesus doesn't promise to be easy.
But it will be the best choice you'll ever make.

Amen.

ⁱ Mark 1:8 NIV

ⁱⁱ Mark 8:34

ⁱⁱⁱ Mark 16:6 NIV

^{iv} Mark 16:6 NIV

^v The NRSV notes about the women that "terror and amazement had seized them" Mark 1:8

^{vi} Richard I. Deibert Mark 117