

## Easter Sunday

April 4, 2021

AFRAID!

Mark 16:1-8

What is your favorite Gospel? Think about it! My favorite is the Gospel of Mark. The beginning verse of St. Mark states that his Gospel is about the Good News of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. In the next 16 chapters he lays down proof that Jesus is indeed – the Son of God. It's an action-packed story of Jesus.

In relation to the other gospels, Mark makes Jesus look like a Marvel superhero. Mark doesn't focus on dialogue nearly as much as he focuses on Christ's actions. This is seen in the way Mark uses the word "immediately."

Mark uses the word ‘immediately’ over 40 times in his gospel—12 times in chapter one alone! Its use gives Mark's gospel an explosive sense of motion and action and immediacy. Mark just can't wait to get to the passion story of Christ where for the first time in his Gospel a human being states that Jesus is indeed the Son of God – and that coming from the Roman centurion after he witnesses how Jesus died. Mark wants us to know that Christ reigns as KING only from the CROSS.

To instill the action with the proper amount of significance, Mark also focuses on the terms "power" and "authority." Throughout his gospel, Mark's focuses on Christ's power over demons, illness, nature, and even death — the

true Lord and Savior of the whole world because of his death and resurrection.

But what makes Mark's Gospel so surprising, is the way his Gospel ends. Mark's gospel, according to pretty much everybody, was the first gospel written, and the one that the authors of Matthew and Luke used as a model, or at least a jumping off point, for their own gospels. Also, according to pretty much everybody, this first gospel originally ended at verse 8 of the 16th chapter, with verses 9-20 added on by someone else at a later date.

And so — at least if we accept the pretty much universal scholarly conclusion that it ended at verse 8 — what is the last word of the last chapter of this first gospel? The final word of verse 8 of chapter 16, according to just about every translation one looks at, is ... “afraid.” So the RSV, the NRSV, the NIV, the NABRE, the Good News Bible, the NASB, the ESV, the USCCB commentary ... and, last but certainly not least, the King James Version!

According to all these biblical texts, the last word in Mark's gospel is ... afraid. The women, the first visitors to Jesus' tomb on that first Sunday after Jesus' death on the cross, the first witnesses to the actual, physical resurrection of Jesus Christ that we're celebrating this morning, when they are first confronted with the fact of resurrection — what do they do? We're told that they “went out and fled from the tomb ... they said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.” That is, to say the least, an inauspicious

end to the earliest gospel, and an inauspicious beginning to the first day of the church.

Are you skeptical? But, really, this is not so hard to believe, when you think about it. The NIV Study Bible notes that “The women had no expectation of Jesus’ resurrection.” Really, none of the disciples did, including those women — Mary Magdalene, Salome and Mary the mother of James as they went to the tomb at first light to prepare Jesus’ body for burial, and none of the men, either. None of them expected a resurrection. Wasn't even in anyone’s mind. Yes, they'd heard Jesus say a number of times that he would be handed over to the chief priests and killed, and on the third day rise again. At least eleven of them were there when Jesus chewed Peter up one side and down the other for saying that such a thing could never happen to Jesus. But none of them believed it. They chalked it up as a figure of speech, set it alongside the other incomprehensible things Jesus said and did and followed along, waiting for the revolution that would drive the Romans out.

No one was expecting a literal, physical, bodily resurrection. They would have been no more inclined to expect such a thing than people in our day and age would be ... perhaps even less inclined. They were more familiar than we are with the basic realities of death. There were no funeral homes or undertakers, back then. When a family member or loved one died, they washed the body themselves, anointed it with spices, dressed it up in a burial shroud and laid the body in a tomb themselves. And, months later, when

nature and decomposition had taken their proverbial course, they returned to the tomb, gathered up the bones into a box and stored them, the way some of us do with ashes in an urn.

They knew as well as we do, better than we do, that “dead” means dead, and they had no more of an expectation of any resurrection than we would. So, when the women went to the tomb that morning, they were expecting to find ... well, a tomb, with a body in it, the body of Jesus, whom they had known and loved, at whose feet they’d sat while he spoke words of God’s love for all, even sinners and outsiders like them. Jesus, whose words made them feel alive and accepted and at one with God more than anyone, anywhere, ever — they were expecting nothing more than to give his body a final preparation for the forever of death. Instead, they found a young man in a white robe saying “He has risen! He is not here ...!” And they were left “trembling,” and “bewildered,” and they ran away!

And here, at verse 8, according to just about every Bible scholar, is where the original story ended: with the women running away in fright. No Easter morning joy. Just fear. Maybe even terror! They ran, because they were **afraid**. Wouldn’t you?

Really, how do you think you would react, if you went to the funeral home for the funeral of your friend, and you’re the first one there, and you walk in to the room where they’re holding the service ... and the coffin is empty, and there is no one there but a young man dressed in a white suit, telling you “He

is risen!” Be honest! What would **your** reaction be?

The last word of the first gospel to be written, the first word for the first Easter, is ... afraid. And we really have no business expecting it to be any other way. Literal, physical, bodily resurrection was no more their expectation than it is ours, when we are faced with sudden, tragic death.

So, if you are here perhaps for the first time, or if you are here because you are a C’n’E Christian (you know: Christmas and Easter, and rarely to never in between) or here to keep a friend or a family member happy, but you have doubts about this whole “resurrection” business — you are in some distinguished company. Some of the big names you’ve no doubt heard — Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, Peter, John — well, they had their doubts, too. It came to pass right before their very eyes, and still they doubted, just like we do some times. When those first disciples went to the tomb on that first Easter morning — they were not expecting a resurrection. The women going to the tomb in this passage were going to the tomb to anoint his dead body for final burial. And that is our takeaway for today. Too skeptical for joyous alleluias and assured - He is Risen? You’re not the only one. They were, too.

So, what shall we do? So where do we take our doubting selves from here? We could look to Jesus. “He is not here,” said the young man dressed in white. Tell the disciples, tell Peter, “He is going ahead of you ...”

“... going ahead of you” could apply to us, today, also. Jesus has gone on ahead of us, to where we know not, exactly, but our faith tells us we need to follow him there. Going ahead of you could be our marching orders. Jesus is, even now, going on ahead of us. We can follow him to where he is going. The tradition tells us he’s coming again, but still, we can’t just sit here and wait, we can’t even expect him to wait for us. We have to look for where he is — somewhere, ahead of us! — and figure out where he’s going and follow him. Is that what the women do, at least at first? Do they determine where he is going, and then follow along after him? No ... they run away! They are terrified, at first, but, sooner than later, they recover, and go and tell the world about it.

These women, too, are a model for us. We see in their reaction not something to frown upon, but a revelation of how people react, when they are first confronted, really confronted, by the Resurrection — when they see it as something that, yes, really, actually, did happen! We’re frightened!

We don’t know what to make of it! And that, too, makes perfect sense, when you think about it. Do you believe in the Resurrection? Really? Are you sure? What is your reaction, really — to this news that, yes, it really is all true? The Resurrection is real! Living proof is suddenly right there in front of you, so you may be able to run from it, but you can’t deny it ... what now? He is risen! He really is! It’s true! And that would mean that it’s all true

then, isn't it? Jesus really is exactly who he said he was, exactly who the tradition says he is, all along. Jesus IS the Son of God – The SAVIOR of the whole world. And so, he really does have that kind of a claim on my life, on your life, on our life, doesn't he? And everything else he said must be true, also! There really is a heaven after we die — and with it also ... accountability! All the stuff about loving your enemies, and selling everything you have and giving the proceeds to the poor and coming to follow him — all of that must be just as real as ... oh, say resurrection from the dead! Where does that leave us? It leaves us, perhaps ... with a little bit of fear...?

But that's a starting point.

AMEN!