

Resurrection and Fear  
 (or, "You Do Not Have  
 to Be Afraid to Die!")  
 Mark 16:1-8 NRSV  
 April 12, 2009 – EASTER  
 Oakland Avenue PCUSA  
 James T. Richardson

**MARK 16:1-8 (NRSV):**

- 1 *When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James, and Salome brought spices, so that they might go and anoint him.*
- 2 *And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb.*
- 3 *They had been saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?"*
- 4 *When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back.*
- 5 *As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed.*
- 6 *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.*
- 7 *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."*
- 8 *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.*

If you were not there, you missed a wonderful experience in worship this morning in our Memorial Garden Cemetery Sunrise Service. A cemetery is really an appropriate place to have an Easter Sunrise Service.

Think for a minute about someone whom you may have known who is buried in our OAPC Memorial Garden.

Think for a minute about your own loved ones, relatives and friends, who have been buried in other places in the world.

Then, think for a minute about this: **To believe that God has overcome death in Jesus Christ is the beginning point of religious faith.**

Do you think that that is true?

In 1834 Edward Mote said it well in a hymn that is in our church's red The Hymnbook:

On Christ the solid rock I stand;  
 All other ground is sinking sand,  
 All other ground is sinking sand.  
 (#368)

**Easter is the most important day in the life of the church.**

And I am glad that you are here!

Are you?

The passage of scripture that we have before us today in Mark is one of **four** resurrection accounts. Each of the four gospels carries an account of the resurrection of Jesus, and while they are basically the same, each of the gospel accounts shows its own uniqueness. So, it is best to get the full picture of the resurrection of Jesus by reading all four accounts: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

The account in the Gospel of Mark is the shortest account of the resurrection stories. The Gospel of Mark is also the shortest in length of all the gospels. It is also the earliest written gospel.

I must be quite up front with you and remind you that today's passage has a problem associated with it. Bible study groups have argued about the problem for years and have not come to an understanding that suits everyone, and so I do not think that we will do so this morning. But we must at least recognize the problem. And then we can thank God that this is not a problem which will hinder anyone's faith.

The problem is this: the last eleven verses of the Book of Mark (16:9-19) are of very questionable origin. Some translations include them and some translations do not.

The oldest manuscripts that we have of the Book of Mark end with **verse 8** which is where our reading for today ends. That is the oldest ending of the Book of Mark that scholars can trace. Therefore, it seems that we must choose one of 3 possibilities:

- (1) The author had intended to proceed further with the story, but was prevented from doing so, either by death or by some other cause.
- (2) The author did proceed further with the story, but at a very early date all that he wrote after 16:8 was lost.
- (3) The author ended his work, intentionally, at 16:8.

(cf. R.H. Lightfoot, The Gospel Message of St. Mark, Oxford University Press, 1950, p. 80)

In any of these three choices, it is understood that the last 11 verses were added at some later date by someone other than Mark.

The problem that this raises for some good Christians who study the Bible is that it seems that by having Mark end at verse #8, the book ends on a somewhat "negative" note. But I personally do not share that feeling. It seems to me that in the passage that we have before us ending at verse 8, we get clearly the Good News that God has overcome death in Jesus Christ when the young man tells the women:

***“Do not be alarmed; you seek Jesus of Nazareth  
who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here.  
Look, there is the place they laid him.”  
(vs. 6 –NRSV)***

Now, that is GOOD NEWS!

And that is what Easter Sunday is all about: **HE IS RISEN! God has overcome death in Jesus Christ!**

Now, one of the interesting things about this account in Mark, and perhaps the disturbing part to some Christians, is the reaction about which we are told on the part of those to whom the young man spoke. Listen:

*“And 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.”*

(Vs. 8 – NRSV)

How HUMAN!

And how much you and I are just as they were! Do you think that is true?

Did you hear the story about the man who had just become a Christian and was about to take a job in the great tree farming area in Oregon? One of his friends warned him that lumberjacks were noted as being a rough bunch of people and that he might have his new-found Christian faith sorely tested.

The new Christian took the job in the lumberjack camp, and he returned to visit his friend after a year's employment. The friend eagerly asked how the new young Christian had fared with the other lumberjacks. **“Did they give you a rough time because you were a Christian?”** the friend asked. **“No, not at all,”** replied the man. **“As a matter of fact, they never found out I was a Christian!”**

*“And 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.”*

**Now, what would you have done?**

Some people have felt that because this incident happened, in the days when a woman was of little value in society, the women did not tell anyone.....or “any man” as the Greek denotes.....because the women were afraid that men would not believe them simply because they were women!

But R.H. Lightfoot, a British New Testament Professor at Oxford University, believes that the women were afraid, not of men, but of God, Whose revelation they had just experienced (Ibid, p. 88). And Lightfoot draws our attention to an earlier story in the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Gospel of Mark:

On that day, when evening had come, he (Jesus) said to them, “Let us go across to the other side.” And leaving the crowd, they took him with them, just as he was, in the boat. And other boats were with him. And a great storm of wind arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him and said to him, “Teacher, do you not care if we perish?” And he awoke and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, “Peace! Be still!” And the wind ceased, and there was a great clam. He said to them, “Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?” And they were filled with awe, and said to one another, “Who is this, that even wind and sea obey him?” (Mark 4:35-41; RSV)

Now, I do not know whether or not, in your listening as I read, you caught the fact that in the story, Mark does not tell specifically that the disciples were afraid of the storm, although it is certainly intimated by their question, “Do you not care if we perish?”

It is AFTER Jesus stills the storm that Mark relates (and it is closer to the Greek in the King James Translation): “They feared exceedingly.” Which is to say that the deep fear in the story grows more powerful with the realization that this Jesus is more than a man! And the disciples ask: “Who is this, that even wind and sea obey him?”

Now, listen to this.

In both the story about the storm on the sea and this story of the resurrection is the word “**fear.**”

- (1) And they were filled with fear and said to one another, “Who is this, that even wind and sea obey him?” (4:41)
- (2) And 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. (16:8)

The two words, “fear” and “afraid,” in these two stories both have the same Greek word in the base forms, and it is the Greek word from which we get the English word “**Phobia.**”

Claustrophobia, hydrophobia, aerophobia. There is one Charles Schulz PEANUTS CARTOON in which **Lucy Van Pelt** is sitting in her little counseling booth with the sign which says: “*Psychiatric Help - \$.05.*”

Sitting on a stool in front of her booth, sucking his thumb and holding his blanket up to his cheek, is Lucy’s little brother, **Linus Van Pelt.**

LINUS: I am in bad shape. My life is full of fear and anxiety.....The only thing that keeps me going is this blanket.....I need help.

LUCY: Well, as they say on TV, the mere fact that you realize that you need help indicates that you are not too far gone. I think that we had better try to pinpoint your fears..... If we can find out what it is you’re afraid of, then we label it.

Are you afraid of responsibility? If you are, then you have **Hypengyophobia.**

LINUS: I don’t think that is quite it.

LUCY: How about cats? If you are afraid of cats, then you have **Ailurophobia.**

LINUS: Well, sort of, but I’m not sure.....

LUCY: Are You afraid of staircases? If you are, then you have **Climacophobia.** Maybe you have **Thalassophobia.....**That is the fear of the ocean.....or, **Gephyrophobia,** which is the fear of the crossing of bridges..... Or, maybe you have **Pantophobia.....**Do you think that you have **Pantophobia?**

LINUS: What is **Pantophobia?**

LUCY: **Pantophobia** is the fear of everything.....

LINUS: **THAT'S IT !!!**

Now, the Greek word “fobeo,” which shows up in English as “phobia,” had as its original meaning “to be afraid” or “to be terribly frightened.” But in the New Testament, it was also used to mean: “to have reverence or respect” and “to be in awe” of the Divine (i.e., God).

ARE YOU “CATCHING” IT? Do you understand what I am saying?

“**Fear-full**” and “**awe-full**” have the same connotation.

I am sure that you remember the very familiar story in Isaiah where Isaiah tells of his encounter with the Divine, with God, in the Temple. Listen as I read it to you:

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and his train filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim: each had six wings; with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: “*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.*”

And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. And I said, “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts.” (Isaiah 6:1-5)

Now, Isaiah experienced **the Divine** in the Temple and it was an awe-full experience.

And the disciples experienced **the Divine** in the boat, in the stilling of the storm, and it was an awe-full experience.

And the women experienced **the Divine** at the tomb on that first Easter morning, and it was an awe-full experience.

So, the gospel writer Mark relates:

*“And 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.”*

(Mark 16:8)

Now, listen to this:

The emphasis at the ending of the Book of Mark is **not** to hold the women up to ridicule because they did not tell of the experience. For, the rest of the New Testament and the Christian church both bear witness to the fact that the women evidently **did** tell of the experience!

RATHER, the emphasis at the ending of the Book of Mark is to underline the fact that in God’s victory over death in the raising of Jesus, the women experienced **the Divine** at the tomb on that first Easter, and it was an awe-full experience.

I hope that you caught the word-play.

In the New Testament, the word **FEAR** can be a word of **fright**, but the word **FEAR** can be a word of **faith!**

**fear-full - awe-full**

The irony of this New Testament word **FEAR**

is that because of our **FAITH** in God in Jesus Christ,

we do not have to be **FRIGHTENED.**

AND THAT IS WHY WE CELEBRATE EASTER!

*'Tis the spring of souls today, Christ has burst his prison,  
And from three days' sleep in death As a sun has risen.  
Now rejoice, Jerusalem, And with true affection  
Welcome in unwearied strains Jesus' resurrection.*

(The Presbyterian Hymnal (PCUSA), Louisville,  
Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990, #115)

Those words written about 800 years after Jesus by a priest named John of Damascus, is found in our hymnbook. John of Damascus was canonized by both the Greek Orthodox Church and by the Roman Catholic Church, and this hymn was written especially for the Easter Season. The hymn tune which we will use is by the 19<sup>th</sup> century organist, choral director, and composer, **Arthur Seymour Sullivan**, who later became famous in the comic opera team of Gilbert and Sullivan. The hymn is #115. Let us stand and sing it!