

*Silenced*

April 5, 2015 Easter

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Here we are, standing once again at the empty tomb, hearing the familiar, yet always startling story of Jesus' resurrection. This year, we got to hear Trey read Mark's version of the story. And as we have joked before, Mark is the Dragnet writer, the 'just the facts' writer. Perhaps no other tale of his fits this description better than today's. Don't you want to just shake your fists and say 'really, Mark? REALLY?? This is the best you can give us of this amazing and mystifying event?'

We would not be the only ones who have felt this way. If you picked up your pew bible, you might have seen that there are several more verses after today's that complete the story of the resurrection and conclude Mark's gospel. The problem is, they aren't Mark's words. Scholars have known for years that the ending you have in most bibles is not part of the original Gospel. Somewhere along the road, a monk, a scribe, someone of the faith, was just as disturbed by this abrupt and incomplete ending. It just made no sense to them. And so, in a fit of helpfulness, or so they thought, they added a much more appropriate conclusion. The trouble is, it is not the end, as Mark chose to tell the story. So I love that today, we are given the original and authentic end to Mark's gospel, as frustrating and incomplete as it may be.

*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. The End.*

Really? The end, really?

Well, when I really think about this conclusion, while it might leave me feeling suspended and wondering what happened next, it also leaves me resonating with Mary and Mary and Salome. You see, as much as I would have loved to have been there, to have the story be about Mary and Mary and Salome and Lesley, on another level, the whole thing is rather terrifying. What would you make of that empty tomb? Of that young man, dressed in a white robe? Of the instructions to go back to Galilee, that the dead, the dead, will meet you there? I'm pretty sure I would be terrified. I'm pretty sure I would get out of there as quickly as I could. I'm pretty sure my knees would be weak and my brow dripping in fright. And I'm very sure I would not have been able to say a word to anyone. I'm pretty sure that I would have been silenced by the whole event.

Why? Well, it is just too much, right? It is just too far out of the scope of expectation and normative experiences. Our minds do not quickly adjust to such shredding of the natural order of things. But there's also a bigger reason I would be silenced along with our three visitors to the tomb. And that is that there would be nothing to actually say. There are no words to describe an interaction with the Divine. There is not language that can adequately capture what the Irish call thin space; that place where the two worlds collide. That is the place where Mary and Mary and Salome stood that morning when they went to anoint the body. And standing there, they were silenced by the experience of the holy.

Now, our young white clad visiting angel is very reassuring. He starts out with 'do not be alarmed. It is the classic greeting from an angel; they are the words Abraham and Sarah heard. They are the words Mary heard. They are the words that begin all encounters with the Divine,

because the Divine knows that we WILL be afraid. The Divine knows that we are not used to or expecting these interactions. But we also know that whatever follows is going to be good news; VERY good news. News that will blow the lid off of life, news that will be beyond our imaginations. News that we could never expect. A son in your old old age. A baby even though you are a virgin. A dead man who is alive.

If you noticed, the women are all about the mundane details of ordinary, embodied life. They are devastated, but there is work to be done. They are horrified by what has happened to their beloved friend, his body bloodied a beaten. But they have stuck with it. In Mark's gospel, the women are the only ones who have stayed the course, who can still be found at the foot of the cross on Friday. And now, on Sunday, they continue on with the needs of daily life. A body needs to be properly buried, so they will see to it. They are so committed to these facets of life, that they even discuss the problems they will face when they get to the tomb. There will be a boulder blocking their way. How will they move it to gain access? Who could they possibly get to help them? But once again. like on Friday, they stick with it. They don't let the possible obstacles stop them. They don't throw in the towel and give up without a try.

They are the faithful that get up every day and put one foot in front of the other. They are the devoted who see to the needs of their loved ones, no matter how trivial or small they may seem. They are the ones who continue to practice their faith even in the face of great obstacles, even despite great disappointment and despair. And it is in the midst of that everyday mundane that they crash into the divine. It is in the midst of plodding despair, that they find resurrection. And in that resurrection, they find a continuation of life that they never expected. They find a renewed hope they never could have imagined. They get an empty tomb and a promise; a promise that he has gone on ahead of them. A promise that he is in fact alive. A promise of new life. It is the same for us.

Mark, the man of few details, isn't concerned with what or how all of this happened. Those are never the questions for Mark. No, Mark is about who. The who is about Jesus Christ, of course. But the who is also Mary and Mary and Salome. And the who is you and me. You see, resurrection is personal. It means nothing if it doesn't include all of us. It is not some magic trick that happened 2000 years ago that now we debate as intellectuals. That's what happens when you focus on the how. But when we listen to Mark, and pay attention to the who, resurrection takes on a whole new purpose in our lives, it is indeed personal.

So while the women found themselves silenced by the empty tomb, at some point, they must have spoken the great promise to others. How could they not? At some point they had to tell, it was too big, too important. We would not be here if they had not! We sit here today, because others before us have found the words to speak of resurrection. Those who went before us, witnessed to this great mystery of life, that death does not have the last word. We inherit the same empty tomb and promise as the women in Mark's gospel. What will we do with that? Will we be silenced? Perhaps at first; it is such an overwhelming promise. But will we find a way to witness to God's truth that love is greater than evil, that the light cannot be overcome by the dark, that death has indeed, lost its sting. Not only lost its sting, but has been extinguished.

*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. The End.*

The End? I don't think so. More like the beginning.

He is risen! He is risen, indeed! Amen.