

“The Blinding Light of New Possibility”

- On an average morning around the Perkins household, my alarm goes off precisely at 6:10am
 - I know it is precise because I have one of those alarm clocks that at midnight each and every night,
 - it sets itself according to the atomic clock in Colorado... via radio signal
 - Almost guaranteeing that I will not oversleep
 - Then, at precisely 6:18am, my alarm goes off again, because I have hit the snooze button 8 minutes before
 - The miracle of modern atomic clocks and their gift of punctuality undone by a simple snooze button!
 - Maybe some of this sounds familiar...
 - Knowing I do not have time for another 8 minutes of sleep, I roll out of bed
 - Walking around the room, I can do it almost without opening my eyes
 - Which is good, because it is mostly dark these days at that time in the morning, as Chicago winters go
 - I have memorized the layout, and with arms outstretched can feel my way around the room, hardly ever having to open my eyes
 - Know when to turn, know how many steps to take, and roughly know when I am getting close to the bathroom door
 - While the room is still mostly dark, my eyes are mostly closed
 - But I can see a bit of light shining under the bathroom door, and I know Katy, my wife, has been up about 30 minutes and is probably out of the shower
 - I open the door and the light is so bright, squinting I make my way- in silence I might add- toward the shower.
 - My eyes so unaccustomed to it that it almost hurts
 - The Blinding light of new possibility contained in the first moments of a new day.
- This morning we are, of course, here to celebrate a bright new day of a different kind
 - To hear once again how the darkness of that tomb gave way to the light of Easter morning

- And this year we have the chance to hear from the Gospel of Mark
- Now each Gospel has its own audience, style, and even its perspective on what the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ is all about
- This Gospel is known for its brass tax approach to the good news, and hurried pace- Jesus almost runs place
- It is Mark that begins with no miraculous birth stories
- And instead gets right to the point and starts out when Jesus was baptized
- And Mark ends just as abruptly
- The original ending of Mark ends with nothing more than three women discovering an empty tomb
 - And then being so scared they did not tell anyone.
- And that's it.
- A big o' to be continued, with very little details
 - Did you ever watch The Sopranos, or Mad Men?
 - Like that, with the series finale simply ending and we all know that the lives these characters keep going on without us.
 - There may even be something big just about to happen!
 - But we just do not get see. It's left to our imaginations
- Fun fact- the Gospel of Peter ends in this way as well. ¹
- Mark does give us a few details along the way- that it was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome who were there
- They had gone to anoint the body of Jesus, knowing it was not done after his death
- They wonder aloud as they walk, “who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?”
- Mark gives us a little bit of Greek word play here, as the word for tomb is very similar to the word for memory²
 - It is almost as if these faithful women, in addition to thinking about the literal tomb, were asking:
 - Who will open the door to our memories, who will open our minds and our eyes and remind us of what we once knew and believed
- They discover the stone rolled back, the tomb empty, and are told by a man dressed in white Jesus has been raised. He is not here.
- They are afraid, they leave and tell no one.
- To be Continued...

¹ <https://www.pulpitfiction.com/notes/easterb?rq=easter>

² <http://gospelhall.org/bible/bible.php?search=mnemeion&dict=vine&lang=greek>

- Over the next couple of hundred years, two endings were added to Mark's Gospel³, I suspect in some search for certainty and details.
- But frankly, I like the simplistic approach originally written
- We know just what we need to know- that the end was not the end at all.
- Perhaps it helpfully releases us from getting caught in the historical and factual traps of the literal, exact order of events that happened
- And maybe Mark's gift to us is to skip straight to why these events are important. ⁴
- With such an open ending, it gives us permission- really it begs us- to use our imagination about what happened that morning
 - And I wonder- what must it have been like for the women who discovered this tomb
 - Mary, Mary, and Salome.
 - Those faithful, courageous women disciples who loved Jesus so much that they were willing to anoint with spices a day-old, crucified and beaten corpse
 - That's love, folks- and overcoming their fear to do so
 - For all they knew, the temple authorities, or even Rome itself, had decided to punish anyone who dared come and show care for a crucified criminal
 - They are also worried about that stone rolled in front of the tomb, they do not have a plan, but it does not stop them and they go anyway
 - Oh my, that is another sermon for another time
 - They arrive, and they find the stone has already been rolled away, the tomb is already open
 - Initial fear and worry overtakes them- Mark records they are so afraid they do not tell anyone, although clearly they did in the end
 - Was this the worst prank in the history of humankind- sorry, I had to get a little April Fools' reference in there somewhere! :)
 - Or maybe it was it the worst kind of revenge possible, not only killing Jesus but making sure his body did not rest in peace after.
 - No- that wasn't right
 - There before them was a man clothed in white with a different possibility
 - One encased in the same possibility that had burned in their hearts when they first listened to Jesus teach, and watched him heal and love.

³ <https://www.pulpitfiction.com/notes/easterb?rq=easter>

⁴ Borg and Crossan, *The Last Week*, Chapter 8, Location 2827 Kindle version

- The door to their memories opened by the sudden inpouring of the light of realization of what has really happened here.
- God refused to let “Crucify” be the last word in the life of Christ
- Everything that Jesus had stood for, everything that God wanted to teach us about a new way of life in a new Kingdom
- About loving God, and loving each other
- About servant ministry, and washing each others feet
- About everyone having equal and full access directly to God
- And about Christ being found in the midst of any two or three followers when they share in a simple meal of bread and wine
 - Regardless of their worldly-assigned worth and merit!
- Everything the Roman and temple authorities feared, and wanted to stop and suppress- it lives
- It has been raised- Christ has been raised.
- The profound and most simple meaning found in that empty tomb.
- Is there any power strong enough to break the cycles that led to this tomb?
- That trap us, those of cruelty, selfishness, poverty, oppression, despair, and death?⁵
- Does such a power exist?? Yes!
- Is it among us right now. Yes.
- Also within this original ending of Mark, you’ll notice a glaring absence in the story- Jesus is not in it!
 - All we have is an empty tomb and all the wonder and amazement that comes with it.
 - So I began to imagine- what was this like for Jesus, this whole tomb experience
 - When he was risen, as the gospel said, and he opened his eyes in the darkness of the tomb for the first time again
 - Breathed again for the first time
 - Like getting up early in the dark of the morning, or maybe even the sudden raising of the lights at last night’s Vigil
 - Did he wake up dazed, confused, maybe stumbling around in the dark
 - Then slowly a smile coming on his face as he was blinded by the bright sun pouring into the entrance of the tomb as the stone was rolled back
 - Slowly realizing that this was only the beginning. That so much lay in front of him and his disciples

⁵ <http://disclosingnewworlds.net/easter-day-b/>

- They were about to embark along side of God in what is called the Eighth day of creation
- You remember the first 6, and all that God accomplished there, and then rested on the 7th
- This is all a part of a much bigger story, even as it is a very significant part
- God has been working for a long time preparing creation for this moment, this era
- I wonder what God is going to create next, and I wonder how you and I can be a part of it?
- God waits for us to join in with this new day of creating and saving.
- What's that great quote from St. Augustine?
 - "We without God cannot, and God without us will not."⁶
- I bet it was dark in that tomb in the moments before the stone was rolled back
 - Dark, hopeless, scary, and confusing
 - Does that describe anything for you this morning?
 - Whether you are being buried alive by personal struggles and grief
 - Or trapped in a world of superficiality and inauthenticity
 - Or whether you look around at the world today and wonder how in God's name are we going to get out of this tomb we are building for ourselves
 - Regardless of the tomb in which you find yourself, this Sunday gives us the best good news we could possibly hear
 - Those tombs have exits. The stones that block them can be rolled away.
 - Literal ones, and those found only in our minds keeping us from being the child of God we were created to be.
 - And God wants nothing more than to shine the blinding light of new possibility into those tombs.
 - It is not magical thinking, it is not a miracle cure-all...
 - Goodness knows following the way of Jesus Christ does not make for an easy life- just look at the apostles!
 - Look at Jesus himself!
 - God did not miraculously rescue Jesus from the cross and avoid death.
 - No, God in the flesh endured death.

⁶ Borg, Marcus J.; Crossan, John Dominic. The Last Week (Kindle Locations 3119-3120). Harper Collins, Inc.. Kindle Edition.

- I ran across a great quote this week from none other than Barbara Brown Taylor
 - Some say it is not an Episcopal sermon without a quote from BBT
- She said:
 - “Christianity is the only world religion that confesses a God who suffers. It is not all that popular an idea, even among Christians. We prefer a God who prevents suffering, only that is not the God we have got. What the cross teaches us is that God’s power is not the power to force human choices and end human pain. It is, instead, the power to pick up the shattered pieces and make something holy out of them —not from a distance but right close up.” ⁷
- Jesus still died. Was still buried.
- God just made sure that it was not the end- there was a way out.
- That there was the possibility of a next chapter, the brightness of another morning
- Hope in the face of despair and impossibility.
- And that is good news for us too... no matter what, there is always the light of new possibility shining into our darkness.
- Shining into every situation, both in this life, and even when as it ends
- May God’s light shine brightly for you, today, and this year
- And may you have the courage to take that step of faith to follow Christ out of your tomb and into that blinding light of new possibility.
- Wherever there is death, despair, and darkness, God is working there to roll back that stone and create an Easter.

Amen.

⁷ Taylor, Barbara B.. God in Pain: Teaching Sermons on Suffering (Teaching Sermons Series) (p. 118). Abingdon Press. Kindle Edition.