

Sermon 3-31-24 Paul Purdue preaching

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they could anoint Jesus' body. Just after sunrise, they came to the tomb.

They came as soon as the Sabbath laws allowed. Magdalene, Mary, and Salome carried spices, lotions, oils, soaps, and towels to wash Jesus' bloodied body, detangle his matted hair, and anoint his body with fragrant oils. Maybe they brought shears to cut wildflowers to adorn the Crucified One? They came to do something.

Along with their basket of spices they carried trauma. It had not been a holy week. A flood of images bounced through their minds: Jesus riding into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday with their hopes and loud hosannas, flipping over tables, Christ teaching, sharing the last supper, praying in the Garden, the clang of soldiers' armor, torches and swords, Judas' kiss, false arrest, police brutality, disciples fleeing, trumped up charges, unethical clergy, politicized judges, a 2am trial, mocking crowds, systemic injustice, the inhumanity of crucifixion, Jesus praying "father- forgive them, they do not know what they are doing", wondering if they did, the sun not shining, a shout, and Jesus breathing his last. Late on Good Friday, Magdalene, Mary and Salome followed Joseph of Arimathea (a member of the very council that convicted Jesus) as Joseph tenderly removed Jesus's body from the cross, wrapped it in a new linen cloth, laid it in his own mausoleum and pushed a big stone in front of the door. These three matriarchs walked with that trauma as they journeyed to the tomb.

What do we do in moments when it seems like evil, oppression and injustice have won? How do we navigate our future when we feel like Love, compassion and justice has been lost? Salome, Mary and Magdalene came together. Our matriarchs came together in grief, acknowledging their loss and in so doing shared the weight of their collective trauma. We are created for community. Perhaps we are only healed inside of community? (2 Cor. 1) "Wherever two or three of us gather, Christ is present." (Matt 18) They came together.

They came together and made a plan. Early in the morning, they bought spices and gathered their resolve to do something lovely, excellent and worthy of praise. Although they could not undo the injustice of the cross, they could clean up Jesus' hands, feet, and hair. They could surround his body with fragrances, flowers, read poems and offer prayers. They could begin a make-shift memorial and register their dissent with the systemic evil that seemingly enfolded them- resisting evil by doing good. (Rom 12)

And as they made their way to the garden tomb, "they were saying to each other, "Who's going to roll the stone away from the entrance for us?" Magdalene, Solome and Mary had lotions and towels but not a 6 foot prybar to move that big rock. Grief scrabbles our thinking like that. They are not weak! They needed tools. A single brick weighs between 4-5 pounds- so a piece of hewn sandstone say 2 feet thick, 3 feet wide

and 4 feet tall weighs around 3,000 pounds. As they walked they strategized: who might we get, what might we use to move the stone.

(but when they stepped into Joseph's garden and) looked up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away. Going into the tomb, they saw a young man in a white robe seated on the right side; and they were startled. But he said to them, "Don't be alarmed! You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. Christ has been raised. Christ isn't here. Look, here's the place where they laid Jesus. Go, tell Jesus' disciples, especially Peter, that he is going ahead of you into Galilee. You will see Jesus there, just as Christ told you." Overcome with terror and dread, Magdalene, Mary and Salome fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid."

Mark has a few other weird endings that scholars tell us were added later, but the earliest editions of Mark end with "*They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid*". Given all that has happened over the past several days, fear is a natural response to finding the stone rolled away and someone sitting inside the tomb. However, Mark's ending troubles some people. It feels a bit unfinished.

Mark does not tidy the mystery up for us. Mark leaves the resurrection more open ended. Mark offers an Easter promise: *Christ is going ahead of you into Galilee. You will see Jesus there...* but Mark does not add any other eyewitness accounts. Unlike Luke, Mark gives us no conversations along the road to Emmaus with Jesus opening the scriptures and appearing as they broke bread together. Unlike John, there is no breakfast conversation with Peter beside the seashore as or Thomas laying his fingers beside Jesus' wounds.

Mark's account does not even include an Easter angel. Matthew reports "*There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. The Angels' appearance was like lightning, and their clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of the angel they shook and became like dead men.*" (Matthew 28) I love Matthew's earthquake, the world shakes with the joy of Jesus' victory! Mark just gives us a guy in a long flowing white robe, dressed like an angel, but no heavenly ID or a radiant glory freeze ray. Just the Easter promise: *Christ is going ahead of you... You will see Jesus.*

I will confess I was not the biggest fan of Mark's Easter, after all Mark tells us the women "*said nothing*", which we know is a literary device because we just read their story! Easter People, we must never forget that women are the first Easter preachers. Matthew tells us that as Mary, Magdalene and Joana ran away from the tomb, the Risen Christ intercepted them and commissioned them as Elders in Full Connection saying "*go and tell my brothers*". You do what you want with a second generation Pauline disciple's rules (1 Tim. 2), but I will follow Jesus.

Mark's ending is a bit startling. As I sat with Mark's ending, I began to appreciate Mark's unfinished Easter portrait. Mark's open canvas reminds us that the work of Easter is out in front of each of us. *Jesus is going ahead of you... You will see Christ there.* Mark

knew Easter was the beginning not an end. Easter was not over on that first Easter, the Risen Christ is still showing up in our lives. *Jesus is going ahead of us. You will see Jesus.*

I have never seen an angel or heard a voice along the Damascus Road. The earth did not shake in 1978 when I decided to follow Jesus, confirming my faith in Mrs. Rose Mckees sixth grade Sunday School class. I have seen heaven shining around me as I walked through the woods and heard the voice of God in the laughter of children and friends. I have felt Christ's presence when two or three of us have lovingly opened the scriptures together. (Matt 18) I have been swept away by God's boundless love while kneeling for communion. I have heard Jesus calling me in the songs of our choir and the words of my beautiful colleagues. I have seen Jesus marching to the capital and just last Wednesday joining hands with our neighbors praying for a safer Tennessee. I have fed a hungry Jesus, built Jesus a home, and welcomed Jesus while chatting with undocumented immigrants. (Matt 25) I have heard Jesus whisper sweetly as we promise to surround someone new with a community of love and forgiveness. (Matt 28) I have felt the deep forgiveness of God when I finally decided to forgive others as freely as Jesus forgives me. (Matt 6) Friends, the Easter story is still being written. The Risen Christ is still going before us. Easter's work is unfinished in us and in the world...

Easter is not just an old story about someone else's experiences. Easter is our story and deeply personal. One line from Mark deeply resonated with me this year: *Christ has been raised. Go, tell the disciples, especially Peter, that Jesus is going ahead of you. You will see Jesus. Especially Peter.* So I imagine the heavenly host rising up to sing the Hallelujah chorus...they are going to blow the lid right off heaven, but just as the trumpets rise, Jesus whispers to heaven's maestro, "hey wait, don't forget Peter, especially Peter, make sure Peter knows how deeply he is forgiven, loved, and welcomed!"

The early church attributed Mark's Gospel to Peter. In Mark, Jesus is the lead but Peter gets the oscar for best supporting actor. Peter stands in over and over for our humanity. Peter is the first disciple Jesus calls. Peter leaves everything to follow Jesus. Peter walks on the water until he doesn't. Peter is the first person to ever confess "Jesus is Lord!" But as Jesus explains the cross, Peter grabs Jesus and says for all of us, "*Lord this must never be!*" (Mark 8) And just before Judas' kiss, soldiers with swords and torches, and everything falling apart, Peter declares "*even if everyone else falls away, I will never fall away, even if I must die, I will never leave or forsake you.*" We know the story too well- Peter fails. Peter fled but then turned back and followed at a distance, slipping up to the fire pit where the guards warmed themselves outside Jesus' courtroom. First a member of the wait staff asked if Peter was with Jesus, then she accused Peter of being "with Jesus" and finally the guards joined in the questioning declaring "*you must be one of them*".... And Peter added spitting and cursing to his third denial. The rooster crows. Mark leaves us with Peter "broke down sobbing".

Especially Peter, broken down and sobbing. Especially Peter. The Risen Christ will not leave Peter weeping or ashamed. "*Go tell the disciples, especially Peter that Christ is*

going ahead of us, Peter will see Jesus.” Friends, “*Love keeps no records of wrongs suffered*”, promises broken, or boasting undelivered. (1 Cor 13) Perfect Love just can’t! (1 John 4) Love forgives, love heals, love restores. As we sing our Easter hallelujahs let us not forget that Love’s work is reconciliation. Love is always reaching out to those outside of the circle who feel alone, ashamed and unworthy. (Mark 2) Love is Risen, Love has won, “*nothing can separate us from Christ’s Love*”, and Love is out ahead of us- beckoning us into the work of love, justice and reconciliation.(Rom 8) Easter’s work is not finished in us or in this world, come Easter People, let us get going: Christ is Risen and out ahead of us leading us into life. Amen.