

“Fruit of the Spirit: Cultivating New Life”

Mark 16: 1-8

I know last week, I said we made it but really it is this week, this day in which we actually make it to our destination. We arrive, not at the gates of Jerusalem but at the empty tomb. It is Easter Sunday, a reminder that the darkness cannot and will not ever overtake the light.

It is Easter Sunday, and there is no better way to celebrate Easter than to retell the wonderful life giving, life changing Easter story.

Now, you’ll notice that I read this year’s Easter story from Mark’s Gospel which is not our usual Easter story. I know I looked. Usually we read John’s version of the Easter story but never in my years here, have we read the Mark story on Easter morning.

Sure some of the details are the same. There’s women going to the tomb early in the morning. They find the stone rolled away. They discover the tomb is empty. These are part of the Easter story. They don’t and won’t change. What changes year to year is how much detail we actually get in the telling of the Easter story.

Let me explain: Like I said, All the Gospels have some version of the Easter story. Some with more detail than others, but let's be honest, we all have our favorite. Most of us are partial to John's version, you know the version that tell us Mary Magdalene comes to the garden alone; sees Jesus but mistakes him for the gardener until he calls her by name, then joyfully she shouts Master!

As people of faith, we really are partial to John's version of the Easter story. He gives us so many details. He tells us exactly what happened on that first Easter morning, right down to where the linen cloths were lying in the empty tomb. If we are being honest, I think that's why we like John's version the best. John shares everything with us about that first Easter morning. He leaves nothing out. He makes us feel like we are there, standing beside Mary Magdalene, wondering and worrying until Jesus calls our names. John's description is so vivid and alive, almost to the point where we can see Jesus ourselves, shining bright, glowing in love's first light. John's description fills in all the blanks for us as people of faith about that first Easter morning.

Not Mark's version though. Compared to John's descriptive twenty verses, Mark gives us eight. Eight verses to describe Easter morning. It is almost like the empty tomb is an afterthought for Mark. Oh you know people like this. They go on and on about certain parts of their story but they seem to skip over the parts we actually want to know about, the parts we actually care about.

That's exactly what Mark does. In previous chapters, he has gone on and on about Jesus' moments on the cross. He has told us every single detail about the moments surrounding Jesus' death, even describing the great tear in Temple curtain when Jesus died. But when it comes to the telling of what happened on Easter morning, we get, Well, you see, there was this guy, named Jesus. He did some amazing things. He changed lives. And oh, yeah, there was an empty tomb in there somewhere."

What! Mark this the Easter story and all you have got to say is that there is an empty tomb in there somewhere. Mark, you're killing us.

The Empty Tomb is the defining moment for us as people of faith. Jesus overcame death. Jesus turned the world upside down. And all Mark can say is that on the first Easter morning, there were some women. They worried about how they were going to roll the stone away. They got there. The stone was gone. There was a guy all dressed in white. And oh, yeah, there's an empty tomb in there somewhere.

And if this description of the first Easter morning wasn't bad enough, Mark ends his story with, "The women fled the tomb in fear, and told no one what they saw." The women fled the tomb in fear and told no one what they saw!

That's Mark's description of the first Easter morning. People in fear, running from the tomb, telling no one what they saw. That's how Mark ends his story. A

story that should tell us all about the defining moment of the empty tomb, ends the women were in fear, running from the tomb. The story just stops, midsentence. The story ends with fear and silence. The story of that first Easter morning just ends, incomplete and unfinished.

Well, as you can probably tell just by looking at your Bibles, the early church didn't like how Mark ended his story. Someone, years later, added the shorter ending, and when that wasn't enough, someone else added the longer ending, giving us so much more detail than, "Oh, yeah, there was an empty tomb in there somewhere."

The early church really didn't like Mark's ending. It decided to add just a few more details, to explain just exactly how the Good News was spread, to explain how the people of God came to experience the Risen Christ. With these two, let's face it, awkward endings, the early church tried to fill in the gaps for us as people of faith, but let's be honest, even these two endings leaving us wanting and wondering.

Now before we totally give up on Mark's version and before we totally get angry at the preacher for not giving us the real Easter story this morning, let's think about this for a moment. Let's give Mark a little credit for not being the worst writer ever. After all, he did write the first Gospel shared with communities of faith

after Jesus' death. After all, Mark's version of the Gospel message did influence the others so let's give Mark a little credit for not being a complete idiot.

What if Mark's story really was supposed to end in fear and in silence?

What if Mark's story of Easter morning was really supposed to end in confusion?

What if Mark's story of that first Easter morning was really supposed to end with us wondering what happens next?

What if Mark really did mean to leave us this incomplete and unfinished story of Easter, leaving it up to us to fill in the details?

I'll be honest, I kind of like Mark's original version better than the alternate endings the early church provided. I kind of like that it is incomplete and unfinished. As a person of faith, this seems to be more in line with our experiences of faith anyway. We have learned that faith is not always black and white but full of gray areas. We have learned that life can be difficult with unexpected turns and ups and downs. We've learned that faith doesn't always have all the answers to our questions.

And it is not just faith that has taught us these lessons. We have also discovered that life doesn't always end the way we think it should end. We have also discovered that situations don't always come to a complete and logical

conclusion. More often than not in our life experiences, we are left wondering, what will happen next.

Maybe that's why Mark ended his Easter story this way. He knew that the resurrection experience wasn't a one size fits all type of experience, that each of us experience God's grace and God's love differently in our lives. Mark also knew that there was no way the resurrection experience would fit and fulfill all our expectations, especially when Jesus never really did during his time here on earth. During Jesus' ministry, he was always defying our expectations. He was always surprising us through his words and his actions. In all of Jesus' ministry, he never did what we thought he should do and be. So really, why are we surprised that even in death, Jesus continues to defy our expectations?

Maybe that's why Mark doesn't give us a lot of details about that first Easter morning. He knew that those details, the how, when, where, and why of the resurrection experience were things we would worry about but not Jesus. As people of faith, we are the ones wondering just exactly how did the resurrection happen? We are the ones wondering, Did God just pop in and shout, "Wake Up, Jesus, It is time to go? We are the ones wondering if Jesus just sat up and said how in the world am I going to get out of here?

These are our questions, not Jesus'. These are the details we think we need to understand and experience the resurrection, but not for Mark.

For Mark, all that really matters is that there is an empty tomb somewhere. Mark knew that Jesus had better things to do than wait around, sitting in an empty tomb. Mark knew that Jesus had better things to do than wait for his crazy disciples to discover that he was actually telling the truth all along. Mark knew that Jesus had better things to do than sit around and answer all our questions of how, when, where, and why that surround the resurrection experience.

Jesus didn't overcome death to answer our questions. Jesus overcame death to bring healing and wholeness to all of God's creation and now that he is back, there is no better time to get started than right here and right now!

As people of faith, all we need to know about that first Easter morning is that there is an empty tomb somewhere. As people of faith, all we need to know is that light and love overcame the darkness.

You see, the resurrection is not the ending to the story. It is actually just the beginning. It is up to us to decide just exactly what comes next. It is up to us as people of faith, as disciples of Christ, as ones who have experienced the power of life over darkness, it is up to us to decide how the story continues.

Let's ask ourselves this morning: Do we really want to sit around, wondering the why's and how's of the resurrection or do we want to leave this place, celebrating, rejoicing, knowing that it happened? That Light and Love overcame the darkness, that God is still working, still writing the story of love and grace that transforms us into the people God created us to be?

When it comes down to it, isn't that all we care about hearing this Easter morning? Is that there is an empty tomb somewhere and it is up to us to decide what happens next in this never ending, life changing, life giving story of God's love and grace.

I don't know about you but Maybe, just maybe for us as people of faith, all that really matter is that we know, we know, Jesus's death did not end his story, that we know, we know, death does not end our story. Maybe all that matters is that we know that there is an empty tomb out there somewhere and the empty tomb reminds us again and again that anything and everything is possible through our God!

For Mark, and for us as people of faith, the resurrection is not the conclusion to the story. Rather it is just the beginning. It is a story that goes on and on, telling us, calling us , inviting us to live our lives as the people God created us to be,

always inviting us to tell through our word and our actions, the never ending, the life giving, the life changing story of God's love and grace.

Because we know all we ever need to know. People of faith, Hear the Good News! Death is not the final Word. Darkness Doesn't not and will not overtake the light. Light and Love will always overcome!

This is God's never-ending story of love and Grace. This is the story that will keep going on and on until God's Kingdom is realized here on earth for all of God's people. This story will not end in fear and silence. This story will just stop. This story will change the world. This is only the beginning. We cannot keep quiet. The story will get out. All because There is an empty tomb out there somewhere All because we know anything and everything is possible through our God.

Thanks be to God! Amen.