

Fear and Joy!

Mark 16:1-8

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. May the words of my mouth and the ears of our hearts be open to the word of God this day. AMEN.

What are you afraid of? Different things at different times in people's lives scare them. Many are afraid of the future, what will it bring, will terror strike, will I lose my job, will there be a disaster. Some are afraid of others, you may be afraid of your teacher, your boss, a police officer that has been following you for a few miles now. Some are afraid of situations, like traveling by airplane, or getting onto a rollercoaster thrill ride at the amusement park.

Fear is one emotion that is important to have, everyone has fear at one time or another, they are scared, worried, cautionary, and probably in most cases it is a good healthy thing to have. Who wouldn't be scared when the car you're driving loses steering or the brakes go out, there's a very good reason to be scared. If you weren't scared, and you just laughed it off and hurdled on down the curvy hilly road, then I am most definitely sure I or even for that matter most people would never want to get in a car with you ever again. Who wouldn't be afraid when the doctor calls you and tells you your test results are in and we really need to talk and soon, can you come by the office today. That kind of fear is healthy, who wouldn't want to fill in the missing information and find out as soon as possible what could be wrong. Fear drives us to protect, to use caution, to seek out the answer, to fill in the unknown, to shine the light into the darkness that scares us so much. It is a feeling, an emotion that helps us throughout our lives and is necessary for us to grow and to thrive in life.

This is the emotion that Mark's Gospel ends with today. Mark describes how, when the women went to the grave that early morning, they were worried about what to do with the stone. They were concerned with taking care of the body of a dead friend. They were grieving and struggling with their understanding of death. And then their emotions suddenly change because they see a tomb that is laying open. Fear probably began at this very moment. What has happened. Where are the guards. Who broke in and disturbed the body. Then they approach and enter and lo and behold an angel, a heavenly messenger tells them that Jesus is not dead but has risen and he has gone ahead of them into Galilee. Then the text tells us "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."

Their first reaction was FEAR. They left and fled, saying nothing to anyone, because they were afraid. Seems backwards from what we expect on Easter to hear. Easter is about Joy, celebration, glee, happiness, but not here in the scripture, it is about fear. The one real human

emotion that the scriptures tell us over and over that Easter provoked in the disciples was fear. Mark tells us they went away afraid. In Matthews Gospel the angel's first words to the women, was "Do not be afraid." Then Jesus meets them on their way back to the others and Jesus' first words to them is "Greetings, Do not be afraid". Luke's Text even goes further to tell us that when the women saw the empty tomb with the stone rolled away and an angel appearing before them, "they were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground."

These women had spent the last few years with Jesus. They had come to know him intimately and loved him deeply. He was their teacher, their pastor, their promised Messiah. But in the past few days, dark dreadful days, they had seen him arrested, beaten, tried, whipped and crucified. They were there when they took his lifeless body from the cross, and they stood by while the stone was rolled over his grave, sealing him into hold of death forever. Then in the early morning hours when it was first light, enough to safely leave the city and go out to the burial grounds, the women went to finish the work of burial, to anoint his body with spices, to say their final goodbyes and lay his body to rest, and then they would return home and try to go on with their lives. This is how you grieve, this is how you mourn. This is what you do to face death and loss. We know this pattern.

But none of us have ever felt the awesomeness of what they experienced that first Easter morning. None of us have in grief, headed to the cemetery to say final goodbyes to a loved one only to find an empty tomb. The woman could cope with the death of Jesus. Terrible as it was, they knew what to do, they knew what ointments to get, how to wrap the body, and how to grieve. But what do you do with an empty grave? What do you do with a resurrection? No one's ever risen before. There is no protocol here. No support groups or help lines to deal with resurrection. No one to take your hand and say "I know how your feeling, I've been there, it will be okay". No one in all of history has ever dealt with an empty tomb, a risen new man, changed forever, drastically different but so familiar. And that is frightening.

Everything the women understood about life was in turmoil. In that one incredible moment death was shattered, and the world they knew, the realities they had lived with were turned upside down. Nothing is secure and fixed now. God had come. Jesus Christ is risen. Life could never be the same. The women couldn't even begin to understand what life on this side of the resurrection was all about. They knew that Jesus was indeed alive, risen from death itself. They knew that their lives would never be the same again. And that is frightening! They leave saying nothing to anyone because they are afraid.

Mark wanted us to realize even the resurrection is not the end. We don't even get a "happily ever after" ending. Instead the reality is that God is not finished with them - or with us;

and that we would be confronted by the risen Christ - the risen Christ as we go through life, as we go along our way. Mark challenges us to believe not simply that Christ is alive, but rather that the beginning of the good news of salvation is here and now - with you, with you right now, not Good news that happened back then once and over. But is with you now! The women's lives from that moment on were changed. Our Lives are changed. All generations are changed, Humanity itself was, is and evermore shall be changed because of this one shining moment when all darkness was done away with, and the light exploded out from that grave and Jesus was raised to never die again. Death was destroyed and now Jesus goes ahead of us, before us, with us and we can expect to encounter the Christ - here and now - in our very lives. And so Mark's ends this Easter morning story with "Trembling and bewildered the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid."

There is some debate among scholars if this is the end of Mark's Gospel. Some ancient text ends the Gospel right there, while other original texts have a short or long version as the ending of Mark's Gospel. But we know the story didn't end with the women going and telling no one, because the Word, the Good news eventually got out. It is a story that is unfinished, because it is still going today. The story of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is part of your story, just as it was for those women that first morning so many years ago, you are also standing facing the graves of death and can see a victory over that grave. And you are left with that glorious message to do with it as they did.

It is scary to think about that responsibility. We are given a tremendous message this day. Death is not the end. The Grave has no power. Jesus is Alive! How does that news impact how you live! We each have the opportunity, amazing and disturbing though it is, to finish the story in our own lives. Jesus Christ died and rose that he might meet you here. He has come to offer you new life, Resurrection Life. What will you do with the news? Will you hear the words of the young man at the empty tomb?

"You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has been raised. He is not here...He is going ahead of you,....you will see him".

How will we finish the story?

The story is told of a young man once came home from a prisoner of war camp who had been reported kill in action. His family and his buddies and even his girl friend had mourned him as dead and then more or less got over their grief. His sudden reappearance was disturbing to say the least. They had all loved him, but they had in effect written him out of their lives. His girl friend was engaged to marry someone else. Moreover, he didn't seem like the boy who had gone off to war. He was thin and haggard and haunted. However, he was now mature, self-possessed,

and, astonishingly, happy. He hadn't smiled much as a kid and rarely joked. Now he was witty and exuberant all the time. A quiet kid had become an outgoing adult man. He didn't fit in the patterns of relationships he had left behind. Quite the contrary, his happiness and maturity were unsettling. He congratulated his former girl friend on her coming marriage and shook hands cordially with her fiancée. His family went to the priest. They explained how their son used to be and told the priest that there must be something wrong with him. "There sure is", the priest replied, "he has risen from the dead and now lives a new life." This new life has changed him forever!

This is the reality of the Resurrection. The dead are given new life. Death has no hold over you. The burdens and pains and sorrows of this world are undone and the Easter Glory has changed this reality forever. The only question that still remains is – do you still fear? Are you afraid of this glorious message? Will you take hold of the new life Christ offers? Will you accept the frightening, awesome, wonderful news that will forever change your life? Hear the Good news and be changed, The Lord is Risen. He is Risen Indeed. Alleluia. Amen.

May the peace and grace of God be with you this day and throughout this Easter season.