

20150405EasterVigil

Mark 16:1-8 Based on a sermon by Scott Hoezee

Imagine a grandfather calling his granddaughter and saying to her, "Grandpa has a special surprise for you in the backyard. It's a brand new bicycle!" When she hears the news the little girl will probably run out quickly to see the bike. If so, you imagine her sprinting away from her grandfather, maybe skipping out to the backyard, bounding out with glee. What you would not imagine is that "Upon hearing about the new bike, the little girl fled from the presence of her grandpa." End of story.

End of story?? Really? Fled? Not much of an ending.

Mark tells us that the women fled. They ran away but not with a skip in their step. They were bewildered. They didn't even tell anyone a single, darn thing because, as Mark tells us in the end, terror and amazement seized them and they were "afraid."

"They were afraid because . . ."

And with that 8th verse Mark's Gospel ends. As I said just now – end of story. It is really the end of Mark's gospel. The last seventeen verses of Mark 16, it has more or less universal agreement among bible scholars were not written by Mark but were added on later by someone who clearly believed Mark had not ended his gospel very appropriately.

Mark concluded his gospel with the bewildered silence of women who were too afraid to speak. But why? Surely Mark knew what profoundly good news this was. Surely Mark knew that these women did not remain silent forever—if they had, how could **he** have even written even verses 1-8? Mark was not there in person but somebody told him this story eventually and if it was not the women themselves, then it was someone whom the women did tell (perhaps the Apostle Peter, who many believe was Mark's source for his gospel.) They did not remain silent. That much we know and can infer. So why end the gospel in that silence?

Maybe it fits a larger theme Mark is working on. One of the most striking features of Mark's telling of Easter is how it is framed by actions and movement. The women begin in verses 1-4 moving toward the tomb, and they end in verse 8 moving rapidly away from it. Indeed, that last verse shows them almost exploding away from the tomb, hurtling outward like projectiles from the middle of an explosion.

Verse 8 is almost like some freeze-frame which catches the women in mid-flight. Picture them with eyes wide in surprised terror, their arms outstretched like some sprinter racing for the finish line, their feet a blurry smudge of rapid motion. They flee the tomb, and Mark snaps a photo for us, freezing the action, showing the women in motion.

But in between this to-and-fro movement of the women is still more motion: Jesus is also on the go. The women arrive at the tomb and encounter a young man who says, "You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified." Yes, they were. Since he was, as the young man admits, "crucified," it made sense to seek Jesus in a cemetery. But he's not there. It's a bit like that young man saying to them, "Gosh, You've just missed him!"

Why couldn't Jesus have waited!? Why do the women need to deal with a proxy, a stand-in, a substitute whose only purpose seems to be to tell the women that, indeed, they just missed Jesus. He's gone, on the road, moving right along to Galilee. "He's going ahead of you," the young man says. So if they want to see Jesus, they need to get moving again; because for some reason Jesus did not hang around to be encountered at the tomb. Easter morning, according to Mark, is not about running over to where we think Jesus is and then sitting down with him for coffee and conversation. Easter morning is not about throwing a party, it's about Jesus in motion, Jesus in action. It's about us being in motion, too, if we hope to catch up with and so see him.

Jesus was not there that morning because there was too much work to do! The world was in need of the renewing grace which only the resurrected Jesus could give. This was a task that could not wait. Jesus could not and would not hang about at a tomb he no longer needed just to greet his friends and have a little celebration. He had to go on up ahead of them, demanding that if they wanted to see him, they'd have to get moving, too.

So why does Mark end so enigmatically? Why this puzzling final image of bewildered women, silent in their fear? Well, certainly fear and terror was appropriate for these women to feel. Not only did something totally unexpected

take place, but this particular unexpected thing was beyond human rational thought. It shattered reality. It changed everything, and the first people to ponder that mind-addling fact were right to feel a little afraid. Any **other** reaction would have been downright weird!

But what about Mark's leaving them that way? Why this snapshot of the flight in terror as Mark's final word? Well, at the very least it creates some tension, a challenge for all of us. We see the silent and fearful women and exclaim, "But the gospel can't end in silence! There's just got to be more to the story than this!"

The Gospel cannot end in silence . . .

Yes. Just so.

Perhaps this, then, is where you and me come in?