

Go and Tell  
Mark 16:1-8  
Psalm 118:21-27a

Westminster Presbyterian Church  
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Mark 16:1-8

When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. They had been saying to one another, ‘Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?’ When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, ‘Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.’ 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.

Psalm 118:21-27a

I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation.  
The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.  
This is the Lord’s doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.  
This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.  
Save us, we beseech you, O Lord!  
O Lord, we beseech you, give us success!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.  
We bless you from the house of the Lord.  
The Lord is God, and he has given us light.

Christ is Risen!

(pause for people to say, “He is Risen Indeed)

But first, Christ was dead.

His body had been stuck hurriedly in a cave-like tomb, with a big rock in front to keep animals out. The faithful women, the same women who were the last of Jesus’ followers at the cross, watching him die,<sup>1</sup> have come to prepare his body for a proper burial.

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<sup>1</sup> Mark 15:40-41.

When they get there, the big rock has been moved aside and they see a young man in a white robe, just sitting there. He tells them that Jesus has been raised from the dead. They should tell his disciples and Peter that Jesus has gone ahead of them to Galilee, and they should meet him there.

The women leave the tomb, scared and amazed, and they say nothing to anyone, because they're afraid.

And that's the original end of the Gospel of Mark.

Seriously.

You will see more verses in Mark 16, if you look it up in your Bible. Those were added later. But that's another story. We'll talk about it Wednesday, on Facebook Live, and I'll make the video available on the church website. In the oldest manuscripts, this is the end of the Gospel of Mark.

It's disappointing, isn't it? The story isn't finished. But it's like our experience of other things in the real world. In the real world, tensions are often unresolved. Loose ends are rarely all tied up like the end of a movie. Our lives are full of unfinished stories—the opportunity we let pass by, the relationship that fell apart, the loved one who died far too young. Part of our experience of being human is finding ways to make sense of our stories, finding a satisfying ending.

Mark is kind of jarring in his realism.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Yes, I know that we don't know the author of the Second Gospel, the one attributed to Mark. Since that's not the point of what I'm saying, it's easier to describe him/her/them as "Mark" for the purposes of a sermon. End Academic Rant.

But he's also brilliant.

Nearly everything that Jesus told them would happen, has happened.

- Judas betrayed him.
- The other disciples scattered.
- Peter denied him three times.
- He suffered and died.
- And now he has been raised from the dead.

Obviously, the women spoke to somebody, or we wouldn't have this story.

Jesus will meet them in Galilee, and the good news will be proclaimed to the ends of the earth. Or else we wouldn't have heard about it.

By not supplying a neatly tied-up ending, Mark has anticipated those gurus of the American culture, Jim Henson and the Muppets. "Life's like a movie, write your own ending."<sup>3</sup> How we live our lives in response to Jesus is the real ending of Mark's Gospel.

The one thing that Jesus said would happen that hasn't happened yet is Jesus' Second Coming. We, as post-Resurrection Christians, live our lives between the resurrection and Jesus' return. And Jesus has told us flat-out that nobody knows when that's going to be.<sup>4</sup> We have to "walk by faith and not by sight."<sup>5</sup>

That's a bit more obvious right now than it is most of the time, isn't it?

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<sup>3</sup> *The Muppet Movie* (1979).

<sup>4</sup> Mark 13:32.

<sup>5</sup> Henry Alford, *We Walk by Faith and Not by Sight*, in *Glory to God: The Presbyterian Hymnal*, #817.

Nobody really knows right now how long this COVID-19 pandemic will go on before the scientists and medical folks can contain it.

Nobody really knows right now how long we should be under a stay-at-home order.

Nobody really knows right now all the effects that this pandemic will have on our society and on our world.

There isn't enough information yet to know these things. Anyone who tells you that they know these things, should cause you to be suspicious of them, at the very least.

So let me point out to you what we do know.

We know that "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."<sup>6</sup>

We know that everything Jesus said would happen that has had a chance to happen, has happened. Jesus has kept every promise He made.

We know that he lived and died and was resurrected for us.

We know that we have been made promises that are relevant right now.

- "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."<sup>7</sup>
- "If you forgive others their sins, your heavenly Father will also forgive you."<sup>8</sup>
- "Come unto me, all you who are struggling hard and carrying heavy loads, and I will give you rest."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> John 3:16-17, NRSV.

<sup>7</sup> Matthew 5:7, NRSV.

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 6:14, CEB

<sup>9</sup> Matthew 11:28, CEB.

- "Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."<sup>10</sup>
- "I will wipe away every tear from their eyes and death shall be no more."<sup>11</sup>
- "...Nothing can separate us from God's love in Christ Jesus our Lord: not death or life, not angels or rulers, not present things or future things, not powers or height or depth, or any other thing that is created."<sup>12</sup>
- "Do not fear, only believe."<sup>13</sup>

So, in this uncertain time, hold on to what we do know.

We know that God loves us.

We know that God sent Jesus to save the world.

We know that our Shepherd walks with us, and that nothing in this world, not even COVID-19, is powerful enough to get in the way of God's love for us.

We know that this time of pandemic fears, of stay-at-home orders and social isolation, will not be forever. It will eventually end.

Knowing that, we can live our lives with hope and joy, even now. We can love the God who loves us, and we can love our neighbors. All our neighbors.

We can love them enough to practice physical distancing, even as we reach out with phone calls, emails, text messages, even old-fashioned cards and letters.<sup>14</sup> Staying at home and

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<sup>10</sup> John 14:17, NRSV.

<sup>11</sup> Revelation 21:4, NRSV.

<sup>12</sup> Romans 8:38-39, CEB.

<sup>13</sup> Mark 5:36, NRSV.

<sup>14</sup> This is why we're holding services online via Zoom: we love you, and we want you to survive this.

not making unnecessary trips is not being fearful. It's all of us cooperating together to keep the rate of infection down – to flatten that curve.

We can love them enough to cover our faces, to make sure we don't make them sick.

We can love them enough to check on them.

We can love them enough to be patient if a bunch of people are checking on us.

We can love them enough to give help if we're in a position to give it, with grocery runs and the like.

We can love them enough to ask for help if we shouldn't be going out.

And we can trust in God.

God sees the big picture. And God loves us.

God walks with us right now, and we will get through this. Together.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.