

Karen Hollis | April 4, 2021

Mark 16:1-8

Easter Sunday

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be reflections of your word to us today, in Jesus' name we pray. Amen

“Jesus has been raised; he is not here . . . 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.”

And this is the end of Mark's gospel. There isn't any more. Two endings were added, but no one thinks they are from Mark. The story ends just like that, dropping the women and us into a reality that none of us were expecting.

The women come early in the morning to do the sad task of finishing the burial process, but instead of Jesus' body, they are greeted with this new and astonishing reality . . . they are stunned and afraid. The women flee quickly from the tomb but cannot outrun the fact that they find themselves now between worlds. Jesus is no longer dead, but what does it mean that he is alive? With that very question, the ground comes out from under them, and breath leaves them.

We log into church, rather than gathering in our building, which deep down is probably already disappointing; we sit in our homes expecting to hear stories of Jesus revealing himself to disciples . . . but there are no such stories in this gospel account, nothing definitive. Instead, Mark opens up a space between worlds and leaves us sitting there.

Perhaps this is what we need this year . . . after a difficult winter, with a number of losses here on Gabriola, a resurgence of shootings and violence on the news, COVID deaths in BC and all around the world, we've barely begun to register the loss we have sustained.¹ Theologian Debie Thomas writes, “We hear what the angel at the tomb is saying to us, and in some deep recess of our souls we know that the angel's words are the most consequential words we've ever heard. [Jesus is risen, he isn't here.] But we're still

¹ Debie Thomas, JourneywithJesus.net

trembling in alarm. We're still trying not to flee."² A kind of spaciousness opens up before us and we wonder, what can this mean? What can this mean for us? This is the timeless question.

I wonder what happens next in the gospel Mark tells . . . something else happens. Theologian NT Wright thinks someone carelessly tore off the last page of text, losing Mark's real ending. But we know, because the women are just like us, they take in this new and amazing, yet destabilizing information . . . and process it. There's a reason Easter is a season, because while this reality of the resurrection opens suddenly and dramatically, our poor human selves can only take so much at a time. Mark gifts us with time and the opportunity to process.

I started planting seeds a few weeks ago. I covered them up with dirt, watered them, set them under lights, and waited . . . (pause) just before the first plants sprout, I find myself wondering if they're going to come up at all. I wonder if it all still works, if the promise of new life is going to become manifest this time and in this place. In a way I wonder if the promises of new life will take root in me, as well. These things take time, more time than we want sometimes. So, I stand there, watching and waiting.

We've been journeying with this image of the butterfly for much of this year; it took a back seat for the season of Lent, but it now takes a prominent place and is queued up to lead us in celebration when we open our sanctuary again. The butterfly is a mysterious and miraculous form of life, and one we often use during Easter specifically because of the delicate and remarkable process of transformation that takes place within the chrysalis. It's a process that cannot be rushed or cut short or all will be lost. Inside the chrysalis is a space in between, where the reality of the caterpillar ends as enzymes break down the tissue. Somewhere in the resulting mess there are surviving cells that tell the butterfly how to grow. In butterfly sanctuaries you can often look through a window into the chrysalis room . . . sometimes they even have a bench you can sit on, as you watch and wait for something that cannot be rushed.

The resurrection has come again this year at a critical moment in human history, where we are desperate for concrete answers and a clear way forward. We are in this in between place where warm

² Debie Thomas, JourneywithJesus.net

weather tells us to emerge, but high infection rates tell us to still be careful; we want to know what to do with our collective grief as losses continue to fall in our laps. There aren't clear answers, nor a clear way forward . . . and yet something has happened. There's a reason the tomb is empty . . . something happened in there. Something happened in the dark, all covered up. It happened in the night, when none of us were watching; and in time it will become manifest again and again in the world and in the midst of our lives. It can be startling, terrifying even. At first, we don't even know what to do with this spaciousness, but as we sit with it; as we give it time to make a home in us; as we find ourselves giving it a body and a voice, the mystery of new life becomes as real as a butterfly resting on a ripening tomato. And we might just find ourselves no longer between worlds, but walking around in a new one, where we can experience for ourselves the risen Christ.