



Easter 2018 Christ Church Cathedral

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 Jesus. 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.

To quote a young Methodist preacher, “This is no way to run a resurrection!”

No way to run a resurrection, first, because in Mark’s account of the resurrection in what many believe is the end of the Gospel itself, there are no sightings of Jesus at all, no stories about Jesus appearing to the disciples in a tucked away upper room, no stories about Thomas getting to touch Jesus’ wounds, no stories about Jesus appearing to the disciples along the road, no stories about Jesus appearing on the shore as the disciples were fishing. In other words, Mark includes nothing concrete to reassure us that Jesus rising from the dead happened at all.

But that’s not all. That’s not the only reason we might believe that Mark didn’t know how to run a resurrection. For there’s the matter of the women in Mark’s story—the three women who visit the tomb in the early morning to care for Jesus’ body. As in some other Gospel accounts, the women don’t find the body of their dead friend but instead encounter a messenger who tells them that Jesus is risen and is going before them to Galilee. This same messenger tells them that they are to go and tell others the news that Jesus is risen.

But in Mark, and only in Mark, the women do not do this. Instead they are seized by two powerful things: *tromos* which literally means “trembling” but which some commentators connect to an experience of trauma and *ecstasis*, that is, “ecstasy,” the experience of being “beside themselves” in wordless wonder. Overwhelmed by a kind of trembling trauma and ecstasy, Mark tells us that the women run, full of fear from the empty tomb, not telling anything to anyone.

And so, as the young Methodist preacher said, “This is no way to run a resurrection,” because Mark does not tie his story up with a big, shiny bow, ending it with the women shouting the news of the resurrection as they run from the tomb to deliver the glad news to the other disciples. “This is no way to run a resurrection” because here we are, some of us in our best clothes, ready to bring an end to trembling trauma, and fear, ready to break any semblance of Holy Week speechlessness, ready ourselves to say “the Lord is risen.”

And so what was Mark thinking in ending his Gospel this way? And what are we to make of it on this day of all days and at this time when, more and more, we need to break our silences and to speak in new and courageous ways?

To get at this, let’s go back for a minute to what Mark tells us.

Mark tells us, first, that the women were trembling and, some would suggest, trembling from an experience of trauma. If this is so, one way of conceiving of this is not *just* that it was traumatic for them to hear that Jesus was risen. Instead, the women must have also brought their own experience of trauma with them *to the tomb*. That trauma would have come from their having witnessed Jesus’ brutal crucifixion at the hands of the Romans, for as Mark tells it, Jesus was deserted by his disciples and friends and only the women witnessed his crucifixion “from afar. This would have been traumatic for them not only because they had hoped for a different kind of messiah, one that would be adored, not be crucified. But it also would have been traumatic for them because Jesus’ crucifixion would have triggered their own sense of vulnerability as Jewish women under the violent and capricious thumb of Roman occupiers.

Those who study trauma say this: that silence is the language of trauma. Speechlessness is the way that trauma expresses itself, for there aren’t words to describe what the kind of shock to the system it is, for instance, to survive a terrible car accident, to watch someone you love die, to absorb a terrible injustice that comes your way or comes to people you love and hope to protect.

Silence is the language of trauma.

But trembling trauma isn’t the only source of the women’s silence. Their silence also has to do with their ecstasy, their ecstasy. Ecstasy—a word meant to point to the indescribable and wordless experience that comes upon us when we’re told something so unbelievable and potentially liberating that we have no reference for it in our experience. For the women, this would have been the news that Jesus, their beloved, the one whom they saw violently killed, was not dead but had been released into the world in a new way. But their ecstasy would not have *just* been about Jesus. For Jesus’ resurrection from the dead would have also meant that their subjugation as Jewish women was over. Jesus’ resurrection from the dead would have meant that life itself was no longer predictably tied up with a one big, dark, sad bow—the eventuality and finality of death.

And so when you think about it, Mark’s ending with the women fearfully rushing from the tomb made speechless by a trembling trauma and by ecstasy makes perfect sense. For why would the women to do anything else.....*at that time?*

I say “*at that time*” because, of course, Mark’s audience would have known that someone eventually said something about the resurrection. For there they were: Christians themselves living in the light of the resurrection.

I also say “*at that time*” for I believe that silence in the face of trembling trauma, silence in the face of ecstasy, eventually finds a voice.

For look—Indigenous peoples in Canada, silent for years about what they suffered in residential schools, found their voice and became silent no more. Japanese Canadians, silent for years about losing everything and going into the internment camps found their voice and became silent no more. Women all over the world, silent for years about harassment and assault on account of being women, found their voice and became silent no more. And young people in the US, silent for years in the face of the trauma of gun violence in their schools and in their neighbourhoods, found their voice and became silent no more.

And so today, this very day, is not about our Gospel tying up everything with a big, shiny bow so that we can sit back in our chairs satisfied with the way Mark has told the story, in the same way we would push our chairs back from a wonderfully satisfying Easter dinner table. No, today is about giving thanks for the women who survived their trembling trauma and who were vessels of ecstasy, who give us a chance to say out loud that subjugation and death will not have the last word in this world and in our lives.

We, then, are the ones who finish Mark’s story; we are the ones who get to do what the women could not do as they rushed speechless from the tomb. We get to break the back of the many traumas that have silenced us and silenced others through speaking up about them. We get to taste the ecstasy of telling the story of how hard life can be and yet, in the face of these hardships, how the oppressed can go free, how the broken hearted can be made whole and how the dead can live again.

And so as you remember those places in your life or in your community where silence reigns on account of the trauma beneath it, as you remember those things you believe you cannot speak up about or remember those people you feel you cannot speak up to, remember this: Christ is risen, and in his rising, you and I have been inaugurated anew into the truth of our lives and into the voicing of that truth. Christ is risen, and you and I have become messengers to the world that life not death, life not death, will be the final word.