Easter

April 4, 2021

Mark 16:1-8

 I seem to have developed a habit lately of reading books with characters I don’t like all that much. This is disappointing, because I like a good story.

 I want a story to pull me in and give me a good reason to spend hours reading it. And I want the ending to be satisfying. I don’t need it to be “and they all lived happily ever after.” But it should resolve the crisis that every good story needs in a way that makes sense and allows me to feel like I did not waste my time reading the book.

 I used to think that the gospel according to Mark was an unfinished story with a strange ending, one that could easily have benefitted from having a few more chapters to tell the story of Jesus.

 Mark starts his story with, “The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” And then he skips Jesus’ birth and goes straight to Jesus’ baptism. No Mary and Joseph, no nativity scene, no angels or shepherds or magi.

 And then Mark ends his story as we hear today. The women arrive at the empty tomb and they run away in fear.

 We don’t get the nice ending that the other evangelists offer. The disciples gathering together and Jesus appearing and showing them his scars and reassuring them. Or the breakfast of fish on the beach. Or the meal shared in an inn with people who suddenly realize they’ve been walking and talking with Jesus.

 It’s no wonder people tried adding more to the ending of Mark’s story.

The women arrive at the empty tomb as if the story of Jesus’ life has ended. They’ve either forgotten everything Jesus said about dying and rising from the dead, or they’ve decided that what he said simply wasn’t going to happen.

There’s really no other way to explain their fear.

If they remembered what Jesus said, if they trusted what he said, the women would have been happy that morning. They’d have been ready for the tomb to be empty, not ready to finish taking care of Jesus’ body.

And when they saw the empty tomb, the women should have been happy. They should have rushed to tell the others that all Jesus had said had come true.

If this was a novel I was reading, I’d be yelling at the women at this point. “You had one job! Go do it!”

Many of us have heard this story so often that it’s easy to be disappointed with the women for not being happy, for not running back to tell everyone what they’ve heard and seen. It’s easy to be disappointed with them for not telling Peter and the others and insisting they all go to Galilee immediately.

Instead, we’re left to wonder. We know the women *had* to have told someone eventually, and that the disciples *had* to have gone to Galilee eventually. But we don’t get those details, which leaves us with a question:

What do we do with a resurrection story that doesn’t have Jesus in it and ends with the women failing to carry out the instructions they’ve been given?

 In all four Gospels, it’s women who go to the empty tomb. They go so they can finish the work that should have been done before Jesus was buried. Each time, they get the news that Jesus is not in the tomb. And in Matthew, Luke, and John, we hear what happens because they go and share that news with others.

 Each time, the broken, grieving, fearful disciples meet Jesus. And Jesus doesn’t just show them proof he’s alive. He doesn’t just take away their fear and their sorrow.

 He offers them redemption.

 God in the form of the resurrected Christ enters into their brokenness and sorrow and pain and brings wholeness.

 **Because that’s what God does for us.**

And then Jesus invites them into the work that he was doing in the world. The mission he came to earth to accomplish. The mission that he was so devoted to that he refused to back away from it. The mission that angered and threatened people to the extent that they were fine with Jesus dying.

We get to hear that from the other evangelists.

 But Mark invites *us* into the story. By ending his story the way he does, Mark tells us that the story of Jesus doesn’t end with the empty tomb. The *beginning* of the story ends with the empty tomb.

Because the *beginning* of the good news isn’t chapter 1, verse 1. It’s chapter 1 verse 1 through chapter 16 verse 8.

 Mark stops telling the story, but the story doesn’t end.

 It doesn’t end because the story isn’t over.

 Just as it was the case for the women at the empty tomb, just as it was the case for the disciples, we, too, hear the good news that Jesus has been raised from the dead. And then we have to decide what to do with that good news.

 Will we be afraid of what it means?

 Will we find it too good to believe?

 Will we keep it to ourselves, wondering how it could possibly be true?

 Or will we share that good news with others?

 Each week, in this place, we hear the good news proclaimed. Each week, we hear that God forgives our sins, remembers them no more. Each week, we receive the bread and wine that are just one of the ways that God offers grace to us.

 And each week, whether we walk out of this building or turn off our computers, we make a decision about what we’ll do now that we’ve heard that good news again.

Will we take up the work that Jesus did? Will we tend to the poor, the oppressed, the forgotten, the scorned and ridiculed? Will we welcome the stranger, accompany the sick and comfort the lonely and the despairing? Will we love our neighbors, love our enemies?

Will we do all this, knowing that all this is exactly what led to Jesus’ death on the cross?

Or will our fears keep us from trusting in the promise of the empty tomb, keep us from boldly declaring, “Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!”

 The story of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, continues to be told, and *we* are a part of that story.

 God gets to be the One to bring the story to its conclusion.

 And we can be sure it will be one where we live happily ever after.