

Easter Sunday

April 12, 2009

Scripture: Acts 10:34-43; Mark 16:1-8

Sermon: “It Ain’t Over Until God Says It’s Over”

“In Easter we come not to the climatic end of the story of Jesus and his disciples, but to the beginning. Mark’s Gospel ends its story of Jesus rather abruptly. However, in the light of the resurrection, we realize that this is not an ending, but rather a beginning. The story of God with Us continues. Easter is the great resumption, the never-ending story.”¹

“The Gospel of Mark is famous for its abrupt ending. It really does not have a full conclusion. Scholars have speculated that Mark doesn’t really have a full account of the resurrection because Mark wants to portray the resurrection as a story that continues. There is no ending because this story is a true beginning, a fresh start with the resurrected Christ.”²

The gospel writers weren’t sure how to end their Gospels, even with the Easter event being so wondrous. Mark’s gospel has a non-ending where the disciples never see the Risen Christ. You heard that gospel read this morning. Three women go to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus and an angel tells them that Jesus will meet the disciples back in Galilee

The women receive instructions from the angel to tell people that Christ has risen from the dead. Yet, Mark tells us that they didn’t tell anybody!

In Matthew, there is a bit more. The Risen Christ appears to his disciples and tells them to “Go, make disciples of all nations . . .” In essence, the Risen

¹ William H. Willimon, “The Never-ending Story,” *Pulpit Resource*, April 12, 2009, 13.

² Willimon, 14.

Christ tells the disciples to stop standing around and get to work. The work of course is making more disciples!

The Gospel of Luke is a two-volume work—Luke-Acts. The post-Easter story is told in Acts and it is an exciting story about the early church. But, the first chapter begins with the stoning to death of Stephen, the first martyr of the church. That is followed by the beheading of James and at the end of Acts we find Paul in a jail cell awaiting his execution. Isn't it interesting where the resurrection faith takes a person?

John seems to have trouble ending the story in his Gospel. The beautiful garden story is followed by disciples locked behind doors in fear and that is followed by the proclamation of the doubting Thomas. After all of that the disciples go back to work as fisherman. Life resumes its' normal pace for the grief stricken disciples until the resurrected Christ calls to them from a beach and directs his beloved to fish differently.

“And to these people who were adjusting themselves to the trauma of loss and grief, the Risen Christ appears. And what he says to them is this, ‘It’s not over. It is just getting started. Do you love me? Then get out of here and go feed my sheep.’

And then Jesus says to Peter, ‘Follow me,’ as if he were speaking to Peter for the very first time. Follow me? That’s what he said to his disciples when he first met them. But now he is saying ‘Follow me’ again, as if for the first time. See? John wants us all to know that we’re not ending, we’re starting over.”³

³ Willimon, 15

Peter you can't go back to fishing. You have to start this discipleship thing all over again. Yes, you denied knowing me, but I know you and I've got work for you and the others to do. The story wasn't over. It was just beginning.

The author Reynolds Price wrote a book entitled *A Whole New Life* and it touched many lives. It was a book about his having cancer and how surgery left him paralyzed from the waist down, using a wheelchair. Reynolds shared how he had to reexamine his life. He couldn't simply pick up and continue his old life, for it was gone. No, he realized that his only hope was to start a new life. He wrote some of his best fiction after he reinvented himself.

Oh, by the way. Peter reinvented his life and found a new way to follow Jesus and proclaim the good news. He was the rock upon which the church developed and it led him to Rome where he became a martyr for the faith. Wow! There is a tremendous cost to this resurrection stuff.

But, I believe Easter offers a wondrous resurrection for each of us if we open our hearts to the Risen Christ. In fact, there are resurrection experiences taking place 365 days a year for God's people.

A pastoral colleague told this story:

In August Mary and John celebrated the birth of their first child. They thought they would not have children, but even though they were late into their marriage, news spread like wildfire through the congregation, Mary and John were going to have a baby! Then in August she delivered a little boy, a beautiful child yet, even as an infant we could see that his legs were tiny, withered, out of proportion to his body. The doctor said that the baby was 'malformed,' that the child would never walk. Yet we all celebrated the wonder of that baby. Of course, it was easy for us to celebrate because we didn't have day-to-day responsibility for

the care of Johnny. Nor do we know what it was like, day after day, to look into that crib, and to see into a future with a child who had been crippled since birth, a child who would never walk or run, or live the life that other children might live. Those cares began to show on Mary and John too. When people inquired about Johnny, or when the congregation made a fuss over him when they brought him bundled up to church that winter, there was a tint of sadness in their eyes, a premonition of the life ahead for them and for their new baby. Some people spoke behind their backs of the sad ‘tragedy of it all.’

But on Easter Sunday, when they came to church, with the baby all bundled up in a new Easter outfit, with little Johnny baptized that day, they left church differently. When Mary discussed it later, with tears in her eyes, she said it was as if a door opened for her, and she saw the way. It was as if during the Easter baptism God Almighty passed a blessing over Johnny’s life and their lives. She saw Johnny, through the eyes of faith, not as a lifetime burden but as a new, unique, undeserved, and special blessing.⁴

That brothers and sisters is the message of Easter. It ain’t over until God’s says it’s over. I think Mark understood the resurrection correctly. It is a story that continues. There are new beginnings for you and me as we encounter the resurrected Christ. It is a story without ending! The Lord be with you. And also with you. Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Amen.

Easter Prayer

“Alleluia! Lord Jesus, on this day you demonstrated that the powers of sin and death, powers that have us in their grip, are no match for you. You entered the domain of death and defeated death. You took on the sins of the whole world and triumphed mightily.

⁴ Willimon, 15-16.

We not only praise your name for your victory, but we are also bold to ask for a place within your triumphant reign. Teach us, in each day of our lives, to live in the light of your resurrection, to follow you into the realm of life and