

## Afraid of Easter?

*Mark 16:1-8*

INTRO:

Afraid of Easter. **Are you afraid of Easter? Should we be afraid of it?**

Perhaps.

ME:

I worry sometimes that my familiarity with all the details of Easter lead me to miss some of what really happened and what continues to happen on Easter.

YOU:

**Does this happen to you? Have you compartmentalized the Christian year so much so it's just now the time for Easter? Don't you just love the purple paraments?** Remember, paraments are the colorful dressings for the altar and the pulpit that follow the Christian Year. *If you do not understand them, ask one of the confirmands about them, since we studied them in confirmation!*

Back to Easter, though. I would like for you all to breathe in. Now, breathe out. Breathe in one more time. Breathe out to complete the set. Please

keep breathing. But now we are better ready to see easter with new eyes.  
Perhaps even eyes of fright.

Let us pray for these new eyes before we turn to Marks Gospel

GOD:

***Mark 16:1 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. 2 And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. 3 They had been saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" 4 When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. 5 As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. 6 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. 7 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." 8 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.***

WE:

It was one of the most unforgettable evenings in his days at Duke university. The library had invited writer Reynolds Price to read his translation of the Gospel of Mark. It was Wednesday of Holy Week, and Reynolds just

sat there and, in about an hour and a half, read straight through the Gospel of Mark, start to finish. Reynolds is a great reader and his translation of Mark is wonderful. But somehow, hearing it all read, from start to finish, in the setting of the library, outside of church, it was **unforgettable**. After he ended, reading the same verses that make up this Easter's Gospel, everyone applauded and left. On the way out, a graduate student came up to Will Willimon and asked, "**Did they ever get the point?**" "**Who?**" he asked. "**Those disciples. Did they ever finally figure out who Jesus was and what he was up to?**" Willimon had to laugh, even though the question was quite serious. In Mark's Gospel, the disciples do come across as the dimmest followers any teacher ever had. You keep expecting that at last something is going to click for them, that their eyes will light up and they will exclaim, "**Now I see what you're getting at Jesus!**" But . . . they don't. All the way to the last chapter, all the way to the end here at Easter, they seem as confused by everything as they did at first. They never seem to get it. Here at Easter, when you would think they would be joyous and happy, as joyous as the Easter hymns we sing today, their predominant emotions are fear and confusion, not joy and happiness. They just never get the point, even at Easter. Especially at Easter. Or maybe, just maybe they do get the point. On their way out to the cemetery, the women wondered. **How in the world were they going to roll away the huge stone from the door of the tomb?** They sometimes sealed tombs with a large stone. But this was a VERY large stone; the Romans wanted to be sure

that the body of Jesus would stay put, that none of his followers would attempt to take away the body to venerate it or to give it a more decent burial. Even though it was still dark, just before dawn, when they got to the tomb, they could see that someone had already rolled back the stone. There was a man in a dazzling white robe. *He tells them that Jesus is alive! He tells them to go back and tell the men who were disciples what had happened. But that's not exactly what the women did. Mark says, "Overcome with terror and dread, they fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid."*

A great actor once dramatized the Gospel of Mark from start to finish, enacting the story on the stage. He called his dramatic presentation "**Afraid.**" That's the last word in this passage, the final verdict on the meaning of Easter—**afraid!** Matthew, John, and Luke all end the story of the resurrection by telling more stories of resurrection appearances, of warm reunions with the disciples and joy. Mark says that, even though the women were told to "**Go!**" and to "**Tell!**" they didn't because they were **afraid**. Today, in our hymns, in the music of Easter you may hear joy, majesty, glory, praise, but I don't think you'll hear much fear. Maybe Mark wants us to think about the good news at Easter not only as joyful, majestic, and glorious but also as **fearful**. The women felt fear. When you think about it, being met by a man who was once dead is a scary thing to imagine. On one level, it's a plot for horror movies. Remember, these women were among the disciples

of Jesus who, just a couple of days before, had deserted Jesus in his great hour of need.

***If Jesus is back from the dead, what will his attitude be toward those who deserted him and fled into the night when the going got rough?***

I believe their fear lay even deeper than this, though.

If Jesus, the one who was crucified by conspiring government and religious leaders, the one who had been crushed by the forces of evil, if this Jesus was *now* raised, *now* vindicated by a mighty act of God and raised to life, if God had stepped in and mightily reversed the whole march of time and history and raised Jesus, then the women knew enough to know . . .

*that everything in the world had been turned upside down and that nothing would ever be the same again.*

**Who among us knows anything more certain than the inevitability of death, anything more triumphant than mortality?** All that lives must die, and all that dies is over and done with.

**If Jesus has been raised, if God has solidly had the last word, then how does that strike you?** If Jesus has been defeated, crucified, dead, and buried, then what we suspected about the world is true. Evil is powerful. Though sometimes there are glimpses of goodness. Because it all ends in death, **who cares?** It all ends at the cemetery in dust, forgetfulness, and extinction. So stiff upper lip, no need to whine; eat, drink, and be merry,

make the most of the moment. Thoughtful people like you know how to get on in life even with the knowledge that you and all you love are terminal. A bit bleak, but I expect you can take it. Become a cynic, or a romantic, or just try not to dwell upon it. We all have various ways of dealing with Good Friday, the cemetery, the stone before the tomb, and so on.

*But **if** Jesus is raised, **if** the stone is rolled away, and **if** life outlasts death and God has the last word, **then** there is some reason for the women to fear.*

The facts of life and death are turned on their head. Nothing is secure and fixed now. Jesus is raised. God is loose, on the move. Something about us could have adjusted, given enough time, to the tomb, and the stone before the door, and the death. After all, God's absence can be easier than God's presence sometimes.

***Jesus—the one who so amazed, confused, challenged, judged us—now come back to us?***

Forgive the women for feeling fear before they felt joy.

***“He has been raised. He isn't here. . . . Go, tell his disciples, especially Peter, that he is going ahead of you into Galilee.”***

If it's true, then **you** . . . will not walk out of here in the same as you came.

THE SERMON IN A SENTENCE:

***It's Easter, be afraid, be very afraid, because Jesus is raised from the dead and nothing is the same!***

YOU:

**Do you understand this?**

The women came out to the tomb thinking that the story had ended, that it was all over between them and Jesus. To their surprise, and even to their great fear, they found that things were not over. Things were just beginning. The last word had yet to be spoken. And the last word was God's.

So, **are you afraid of Easter?** *If so, good! If not, do you really understand what happened at Easter?*

CLOSE

The women were confused because they realized that they were witnessing a new world emerging from an old world after Jesus's resurrection:

***“They’re paralyzed. Something has gone wrong—or has gone so right they can’t take it in. Mark leaves the story there, with the men too afraid to come, and the women leaving terrified. But one thing, they knew; somehow it was clear to them and the world was not the same anymore. It was a new world. They just didn’t know what to do with it yet. But they would find out.***

***In raising Jesus of Nazareth from the dead, God showed us the world according to God. In Jesus Christ the world is now a new world. It is a world where the meek do inherit the earth, even when they don’t have a deed to it registered in the courthouse. It is a world where the poor in spirit have the only riches, and among the poor the bread is blessed and***

***broken and everyone has enough. It's where everyone knows that enough is a feast (in the old world a feast is not enough!). In the new world of the resurrection, those who mourn are more than comforted; they dance before the Lord with their dead—often while they are still grieving. It is a world where the peacemakers know themselves, and everyone else, as children of God, and the merciful know what mercy does; it turns our enemies into sisters and brothers and causes weapons to rust and corrode or be transformed into tools.***

***So Happy Easter, so Fearful Easter!***

2000 years later, we still don't have it all figured out. But we have got each other on this journey and God, through Christ, his Word, and others . . . keeps sharing wisdom with us to pass on to their next one.

***Let's pray for comfort in the midst of fear and clarity in the midst of life...***