

Easter Sunday, 3/31/2024, St. David's Episcopal, Mark 16:1-8 (*Elizabeth Felicetti*)

“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.”

This year we are focusing on the Gospel of Mark, and his account of the resurrection is so different than the others. Often we hear John's version, which begins with Mary Magdalene, then the disciples racing, the empty tomb with the linen wrappings and the cloth rolled up in a place by itself. The two disciples leave while Mary weeps. Then she converses with an angel, and then Jesus himself.

Mark leaves so much more to our imagination. Culturally we may associate Easter with beautiful colors and clothes and a bunny who leaves chocolate. But that first Easter, terror and amazement dominated. “And they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.”

Instead of an angel, Mark writes about a young man dressed in a white robe sitting outside the empty tomb. Who was this man? Mark also has a young man in his passion reading, which we heard last Sunday. That young man doesn't appear in any of the other gospels. In Mark, after the disciples fled following Jesus' arrest, “A certain young man was following him, wearing nothing but a linen cloth. They caught hold of him, but he left the linen cloth and ran off naked.” I have always wondered about that young man, and this year wonder if he was the same young man we read about here, sitting outside the tomb, sharing the joyous news that Jesus has been raised. Who knows?

I am grateful for the way Mark allows our imaginations to fill in gaps, and I am also grateful for this abrupt ending. Later editions of Mark added on to this story, but the language and content make clear that those were in fact additions. I prefer this shorter ending, with all of its uncertainty. In the midst of the uncertainty, we still have good news of great joy. It's just unbelievable.

I sent out a letter on Good Friday letting you all know that this will be my final Easter as your rector. My cancer has spread, and I will start chemotherapy in a little over a week. I will try to come on Sundays only through mid-May, and then I am going to need to apply for long-term disability.

This has been a hard pill to swallow during Holy Week, but the timing has also felt a little like a gift. In Lent, we are invited, starting on Ash Wednesday, to pay attention to our mortality. Our impending deaths. On Easter, we turn to the resurrection. Christ defeating death. This message resonates with me in a way that it never has before when I realize that I have to stop leading this church that I love to focus on my health. My prognosis is not good, but I am a Christian. I believe in the resurrection. I believe that Jesus Christ defeated death because he loves us so much, rising three days after a brutal death by crucifixion. Death does not get the last word: love does.

I'm grateful that we have Mark's version of events for our last Easter together with me as your rector. Mark captures the uncertainty and fear of that first Easter. The young man shares good news with the women who came to the tomb, but they are confused and frightened. That's an appropriate response to someone being raised from the dead. Since this is our core story as Christians, we may not always recognize how utterly shocking Jesus' resurrection was.

These women watched him die. They had come together very early on the first day of the week so they could anoint him with spices, because he had been buried so hurriedly after crucifixion that there was not time, since it was the sabbath. Now they show up early in the morning to find the stone rolled away and a young man with good news of great joy—and they fled, because it was so confusing and unbelievable.

Some have said that Mark does not have a story of resurrection if we accept today's reading as the end of his gospel. But we do have resurrection. We just don't see Jesus himself. We see an empty tomb and hear a declaration. We have terror and amazement.

Last year, I didn't get to be with you in person for Easter. I watched the service from the livestream. I'm so grateful to be here with you this morning, even as I feel afraid and uncertain about what's next for me. Those women did not lack faith when they fled. They were understandably shaken and confused. As we ponder together what's next for St. David's, we may also be upset and confused; but ultimately our Christianity teaches us *resurrection*. New life. Love. We've lost people we love since last Easter, and we will lose more over the next year. We will grieve together, as these women gathered together to grieve.

But ultimately, we will be overwhelmed by the enormity of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, our core story. We may be amazed and terrified: that's appropriate. But I hope that unlike these women, we will say something to others. We will overcome our fear. We will pin our hopes on this Easter story, which ends in confusion and awe and great, deep joy.