

*Resurrection as Resistance: Finding the Seedbed of New Life*

Easter Sunday

April 1, 2018

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Texts: Acts 10.34-43;  
Psalm 118;  
1 Corinthians 15.19-26;  
Mark 16.1-8

I know it's unsettling to hear the resurrection story from Mark when we end at verse 8, which the most ancient manuscript of Mark does. I had the option of preaching from John but I kept coming back to Mark. Because his telling of the resurrection as the earliest written gospel that we have in this earliest version that ends with the women fleeing the tomb in terror and amazement, saying nothing to anyone for they were afraid – this version strikes me as one of the most engaging ways to end this story. I say that because it pulls us in. Clearly this is not how the story ends!

So, let's go back to the beginning of that first Easter morning. The women rose before the dawn to tend Jesus' body. They just sat through what must have felt like the longest Sabbath of their lives. Nothing but time for those brutal images from the day before to keep flashing before their eyes and the grief to descend. I wonder what thoughts went through their minds as they waited for the dawn. Were they scared that the soldiers would come for them next? Were they simply sad that he was gone? Did the anxious questions start crashing in: Was God's power gone with him? Was the healing he had offered and the freedom he had promised gone too?

If they slept at all I imagine them waking with swollen eyes and heavy hearts but ready to face the reality of his death. Ready to engage this ritual of remembering, offering their love for him in this physical, tangible way. To finish what the woman who anointed Jesus at Bethany had begun. They went there expecting closure. And found instead a startling possibility they never imagined in that long night! Maybe he is not gone. Maybe this is not the end. This stranger – whom later gospels recognize as an angel – this stranger tells them that they were “looking for Jesus of Nazareth who was

crucified. He has been raised; he is not here...he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.”<sup>1</sup>

I’ve reflected with you once before on the significance of this instruction to meet Jesus in Galilee. I’ve long heard it as an invitation to go back to the beginning to hear the story again. Mark begins his account of Jesus’ ministry with these words: “...Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God.”<sup>2</sup> To hear that Jesus is going to meet them in Galilee is an invitation to experience his life with them all over again but with completely new eyes to pick up what they missed before; to go back over his teaching, to remember his touch of healing, to remember the fire of his prophetic vision of justice and his unrelenting call to resist the power of sin by which he means anything pulls us from God’s love and God’s ways. It’s an invitation to them and to us to tell and re-tell the story. Hearing what we need to hear this time. Seeing what we couldn’t see before. Rediscovering the power, the healing, the forgiveness, the peace.

This time around, I heard something new in the promise that Jesus was going ahead of them to Galilee. Not just an invitation to go back to the beginning of Mark and hear it all again; to probe their past relationship with Jesus. As rich as that probing can be. How often do we experience God in new and vibrant ways in a passage of Scripture we have heard a hundred times when something new just jumps off the page and redirects our thinking entirely or settles right into the middle of our heart or grabs us in the gut?

I was reminded in some reading I was doing that Galilee is not just the place Jesus began his ministry; it is the territory of the Gentiles. This is the center of the mission to the nations that would begin after Pentecost when the story expands beyond this small gathering of Jewish disciples and makes its way into all the world.<sup>3</sup> The Spirit of the risen Christ was going ahead of them into that world beyond the regions they had ever gone before; taking them to new understandings and engagements. Yes, they

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<sup>1</sup> Mark 16.6-7, NRSV

<sup>2</sup> Mark 1.14, NRSV

<sup>3</sup> Lamar Williamson, Jr. Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching, Mark (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 285.

have a story to tell as do we. To bear witness to the good news we have experienced in the life, the death, the resurrection of Jesus. But their experience - their story - would not define or limit the reach of God's realm. What they would encounter out in Galilee where Jesus was going on ahead of them was beyond anything they could have imagined. Jesus was not done teaching or healing or pushing them. As Peter would discover in the days ahead and as we heard him proclaim in the book of Acts today.

Resurrection is not initially about comfort. It's about resistance. It's about resisting the pull of despair and hopelessness. I'll be honest with you, it's a pretty strong pull. As Gordon described the world last week in his children in worship story sometimes it feels like harm is strong, suffering is strong, and the feeling that we are alone is so strong. Resurrection invites us to resist the pull. Yes harm is strong, suffering endures, and feeling that we are alone in it is a feeling that come over any one of us. It flashed over Jesus just before he died.

But that was not the end. That was not the end of him. It was not the end of his ministry. It was not the end of his teaching, or his healing, or his power. In fact, the power to change, to transform, to make the world right, to heal and to forgive it would be amplified through his resurrection as his Spirit would lead them out into Galilee and beyond. Where we will encounter that power of resurrection, that presence of God that heals and changes us can be very, very surprising!

On Friday afternoon after traveling through the fullness of this holy week through the Tenebrae service and the Good Friday service, I was feeling the intensity of this of it all. And before pulling myself up off the floor to turn toward Easter and this sermon, I opened my Hulu app for something mindless to watch for an hour before diving in. I picked Grey's Anatomy and was so surprised as I am sitting there weeping at this exchange on this show that is often a mindless soap opera.

It was a moment of watching someone who was totally surprised by an encounter with God. Dr. Kepner, who is the one evangelical Christian on the show, has been devastated by the death of her child several years before and that devastation had turned in to a deep an ugly bitterness. In

this episode a Rabi is under her care who is dying from a rare reaction to antibiotics. He can see under all of that harsh exterior that she is suffering, and he teaches her about this Jewish idea that if you can take even 1/60<sup>th</sup> of a person's pain away that is goodness, that is God. He pushes and pushes for her to tell him what is troubling her soul and she finally says "My whole life I followed his rules. I studied, I believed, I practiced what I preached. I did every single thing that he asked of me."

They have this fascinating exchange where he pushes her saying "And that guarantees you?? What? Where is the guarantee? No where in any faith is there a guarantee." And when she protests that she doesn't need it to be good all the time she wants it to be fair, he roars at her: "Fair?! Where was it fair when Isaac went blind and his child betrayed him or when Sarah had to wait 99 years for a child only for God to say "sacrifice him", Moses never made it past the bouncer to the promised land and like I said I'm not up on the sequel but from what I hear Jesus got a raw deal...Nobody in the Bible lived a life free of suffering or injustice ... and if they lived lives like that then why should ours be different?" She cries out "So the world is just cruel and random and there's nothing anybody can do about it?" That's the pull right there.

He is getting close to the end, gasping for air and he says to her: "You sound like a child. Terrible things happen. Terrible and wonderful. Devastating things happen. Who are you to know why. Who are you to know why some people die and other people live?... So you can either believe in God and goodness or you can believe it's pointless, it's cruel, it's random. Whichever makes you happier." As she cries that she is not a narcissist (as he had accused her earlier in the conversation) he says "Then what it is it? Unbearable pain? God's not indifferent to our pain. Tikkun olam - means that the world is full of brokenness and its our job is to put it back together again."<sup>4</sup>

I did not expect to receive that wisdom from Judaism by way of Grey's Anatomy on Good Friday when I was feeling the weight of the world.

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<sup>4</sup> This is my summary and transcript from watching Grey's Anatomy Season 14, Episode 17.

Parker Palmer echoes the wisdom of this Rabbi in his book, *A Hidden Wholeness*, when talks about the hope that comes when we can “let devastation become a seedbed for new life.”<sup>5</sup>

Friends, this is the power of resurrection: this capacity of God to meet us in surprising places and in ways we could never imagine; to help us take anything that comes our way, even the devastations and help us to find and cultivate the seedbed for new life.

Friends Jesus Christ is risen!

This is good news!

Alleluia!

Amen.

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<sup>5</sup> This phrase from Parker Palmer was quoted in an article in the *Christian Century* by Osheta Moore in the November 8, 2017 issue.