

Pastor Roy's Sermon from Easter, April 8, 2012

If we were reading the gospel of Mark for the first time, this would be a shock upon shock. First, before his death, Jesus offered no defense to disprove his accusers since they were obviously not serving the cause of justice but that of their own greed and desire to hold on to power. No arguments: Simply surrender, a severe beating, insults, but he takes it all without hardly even a response to his enemies. Then he is on the cross, so vulnerable, *but not a victim!* Past any hope in survival--waiting to die. Yet submitting to all of this willingly because it is necessary and the best and most compassionate choice he could make given the political and social makeup of the day. Then he dies and is mercifully buried. Everyone goes home, numb from disbelief and despair.

A day passes, another day comes. The Sabbath is over, so now is the time to provide a proper burial. There was no chance for the proper Jewish burial since he died right before the sabbath began. So the women set out to be faithful in the only way they could.

In the Gospels the women seem to always get it right. It's almost as though the gospel must be learned by us men but you women—you seem to come by it a bit more naturally. So here come the faithful friends of Jesus who are women. They find the tomb open and a young man already there, in white. Now the real shock comes. They could accept that Jesus let go of his life in the face of oppressive, crushing, religious force. For that they've grieved for two solid days. But this? What can they do with the totally unexpected word of the young man in white, "Don't worry, Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified, is *not* here because he has been raised. See the empty tomb? Go tell his disciples and Peter that he will *meet them* in Galilee."

How do you react when reality confronts you with something totally new. It shatters your expectations. This is simply not possible. All of your assumptions about life and death are challenged. What does it mean to live. What does it mean to die? Can the living be dead? Can the dead be alive? All that talk of Jesus' that those who cling to life will lose it and those who let go of their lives will find it? He really meant that and it turned out to be true! O, they could and should have seen this coming, but they didn't because they were just like you and me. We learn slowly. It would take time to fully embrace this new way of living with open hands to God and one another, rather than closed fists.

So what else could they do, it was too much to take in all at once. They look at each other and run. Suddenly, Everything has changed. Now, Jesus is not only teacher, but Lord.

It was all so personal. What happens next? These women, the first witnesses, scatter. In their terror and amazement, they knew there was hope. Hope isn't the kind of thing you control. Hope finds you. You wait with it. It holds you up quietly and gently. You don't fake hope. It allows you to breathe again. It allows you to think about the future. It gives you company. These women? They can do this. They begin again. They start over. A new beginning. Of course, there will be more questions than answers, yes—but at least they are no longer in the darkness. There will be more disappointments, more uncertainties, but this hope will go with them. Here is hope that will sustain in the most difficult of challenges.

Hope lives in the kingdom of possibilities. If we demand certainty and evidence of hope, it crumbles into nothing in our palms and evaporates. But if we receive hope with open arms and trust in the life which God grants freely in life and in death, then we are on the path of resurrection, we have met the risen Lord.

The book of Acts especially thinks of Jesus' resurrection as God's validation of Jesus' sacrifice of love. The divine "Yes!" He got it right! Now the women and the disciples and each of us who meet the risen Lord will do likewise, and not be afraid! No need to fear, anymore. Yes, it takes practice and discipline to remember this new mindset of the Living Christ.

Mark ends his story so suddenly and oddly! The women do not tell the story and they scatter in fear. They are totally overwhelmed. We assume they did tell, with time and worked through their fear.

If we were reading the gospel for the first time and had never read Matthew, Luke, or John or any other book in the New Testament, what would we think when Mark cuts off the book with the women fearing for. . . well, he basically cuts off in the middle of a sentence.

The ancient manuscripts of Mark do not agree on how the gospel ends. There are four different possible endings. There is the abrupt cutoff with the women scattering silent and afraid. There is also a short ending found in some ancient manuscripts which doesn't sound anything like Mark's writing, and a longer ending which sounds just as foreign. Both are helpful in their own way. Finally, there is the chance that Mark's original ending somehow got damaged or lost. Personally, I think Mark's original ending was the abrupt one.

The women are afraid and keep silent. We are told that Jesus will meet the disciples in Galilee, but the text doesn't tell us whether or not this happens or how it happens. The other gospel writers tell us how Jesus met with his disciples, but not Mark—and Mark was likely the first Gospel writer.

Could it be that Mark is telling us that we are part of the gang headed for Galilee? That we complete the story? Mark is telling us to make a decision about this risen Jesus.

Will you and I go and meet the risen Lord? . . . And learn to set aside our fears and uncertainties to live with courage as Jesus did? To be raised as Jesus is?

*How have **you** met the risen Lord?* Yes, it begins here with the proclamation of the Word of hope. But that is only the beginning. We meet the risen Lord at home, at work, at school, in the woods surrounded by creation, in a dark room with a lit candle, in our neighbors, perfect strangers, and friends. No one can meet the risen Lord for you. You must meet him yourself and be shocked that life can come from death, that life can be--beyond the grave. We, too, must run, walk, and be still to figure it all out. The challenge is to learn from the Spirit to uniquely meet and serve the risen Lord.

The Lord is Risen. (He is Risen, indeed!)

Amen.