

April 3, 2021
Easter Vigil, Year B
The Rev. Keri T. Aubert
St. Thomas's Episcopal Church, New Haven, CT

Romans 6:3-11
Mark 16:1-8

“... they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.”

Some of the most ancient texts end the Gospel of Mark right there. If you open your Bible, you'll see two short addendums, which are noted as such. To me they always seem a little suspicious, rather like an afterthought. Still, just up and stopping where we did can feel a little uncomfortable. If we let Mark stop there, we don't learn whether Mary, Mary, and Salome break their silence to give the young man's message to Peter and the disciples; we don't learn whether Jesus shows up to be seen in Galilee. And besides, what kind of story ends with the word *afraid*?

Of course, we do have those addendums to Mark, and we have the post-resurrection stories in the other three gospels. If Mark's ending seems abrupt or incomplete to us, we have other material with which to fill in the blanks. It's hard not to, even subconsciously. Still, at least for tonight, let's try to stop right here.

Mark's close makes a sort of sense, at least for him; he was a man efficient with words, if his Gospel is taken as evidence. Throughout, it is short and to the point: Jesus wastes no time lingering. Instead he finished one task and immediately rushes to the next one. Mark is my favorite gospel, perhaps because I find it the most enigmatic. How could this short tale with its tragic ending be enough to get people to drop everything and get on board with the Jesus?

I have arrived at only one answer to that question: it wasn't because they read this gospel or any other. The momentum that built Christianity was started before any of the gospels was written down. Jesus' message was passed from person to person, in actions shared from life to life. The written gospels came along later. Each one was an attempt to distill from the air the essence of what happening among them. What was happening among them wasn't just or even primarily about words. It was about the new life that was stirring among them. It was about Jesus rising among them every time they fed and healed and loved. But you know what? Doing those things is hard. Because they're hard, maybe fear will always be part of the story. Mary and Mary and Salome may have been afraid, but they let the cat out of the bag, and Jesus showed up.

The living Jesus had changed their lives, and the risen Jesus continued to do so. That's where we come in. The risen Jesus just keeps showing up. I don't really think that empty tomb is about a get-into-heaven-free card. I think it's about what the risen Christ is still doing. God is reconciling the world. We get to be a part of it. It's about me, but it's not at all about me. It's about the promise of new life now and forever. I don't expect any of us can even really understand it. But we know there's something to it, because we get glimpses of it from the world around us.

Let's hear again what that young man said in the tomb to Mary and Mary and Salome: “He has been raised; he is not here.” With the terse ending on a terse gospel, maybe Mark intends to transfer Jesus' energetic imperative onto his followers: Jesus is risen; y'all get busy! For Mark's young community of Christ-followers, it must have been enough. Maybe it's enough for us, too. Jesus is risen; y'all get busy!