Run

A Meditation on Mark 16: 1 – 8

Rev. Cathy C. Hoop Grace Presbyterian Church April 4, 2021

“For terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.” So ends the gospel of Mark. Amazement. Dread. Bewilderment. Terror. That is the *ending* of Mark’s gospel. It is an almost perfect ending – yes, perfect - as the writer leaves us wondering and wanting more…how long did it take for the women to reclaim their voices? Did amazement win out over terror?? What happened when the disciples set out for Galilee – did they even expect to find Jesus? We want to know, and Mark leaves us wanting…which is exactly what Mark hoped to do.

I want to clear up something I said in last week’s sermon…I mentioned Mark’s naked man but included him in the events of Easter morning, and I am very grateful for UA’s Dr. Ted Trost who sent me a fabulous email about that man. To set the record straight – there is a man who flees, leaving his clothing behind, but he flees on the night of Jesus’ arrest, not on Easter morning.

On the night of the arrest, the soldiers arrive in the garden, Judas places that kiss - both bitter and sorrowful - on Jesus’ cheek, and in a rather frantic and senseless act, the chief priest’s slave’s ear is cut off by one in the crowd. Jesus responds, “Day after day I was with you in the Temple teaching and you did not arrest me. But let the scriptures be fulfilled.” (Mark 14: 49) Then all of Jesus’ companions run for their lives. They scatter. Everyone deserts Jesus. And Mark tells us “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.”

Dr. A.J. Levine writing about this mysterious figure: “Some think he might be Mark himself (putting in an appearance in the Gospel much as Alfred Hitchcock always put in a cameo in his movies)” [[1]](#endnote-1) Not a very flattering cameo, to include yourself as one who abandoned Jesus, but an honest reflection of what the majority, if not all of us, would have done. Who is it? Is it Mark? Some say it is Lazarus, or Jesus’ brother, or one awaiting baptism…there are any number of possibilities.

Levine continues, “perhaps [the unknown figure] is Mark’s reader—fearful, naked, risking arrest himself, about to face the death of Jesus, and unable to do anything about it. He remains a mystery, and into his mystery we move, step by step, to the cross. We too are vulnerable and fearful, we too have deserted, we too have failed to stop what cannot be stopped. Before we can be built up, Lent will strip us down, and in that rawness, that openness, we can begin to heal. Before we get to the resurrection, there will be suffering, and crucifixion, and death.”[[2]](#endnote-2) This week we have walked with Jesus, through the Last Supper, through the crucifixion and on to the tomb.

Now, as we stand here, on Easter morning, let’s stay with this vulnerable figure, let’s place ourselves there, with him. And let’s imagine the possibility that Dr. Trost suggests, that the young man, the neaniskos, rather than running away from something, is perhaps, running *toward something*.[[3]](#endnote-3) As he runs, his pursuers catch him by the linen cloth in which he is wrapped. He leaves that behind as he eludes them. This linen cloth, or sindone in the Greek, is a fine cloth, the kind of cloth that would be tenderly wrapped around the body of the deceased. Matthew, Mark & Luke all employ this word, sindone, when they speak of the shroud in which Jesus’ body was wrapped.

If this follower is *leaving behind* the burial cloth, if he is throwing off death’s garments, isn’t this then a symbol of hope even as Jesus is moving towards death? “He runs off into the darkness” (What a good darkness, to give him shelter from his pursuers!) “a spirit, a freed and naked being, untethered by the prison of earth and the violence of arrest and betrayal,” writes Rev. Patricia de Jong. It is as if Mark is reminding us that all is not lost, that there are some who cannot be captured and held against their will.”[[4]](#endnote-4) Is he the precursor, the forerunner, running toward life? Having been buried with Christ, as symbolized by the sindone, he then sheds this cloth, a reminder to us all that Jesus will not wear this cloth for long. A reminder than none of us will be wrapped in burial clothes forever.

From the arrest in the garden of Gethsemane, Mark carries us forward, through the trial and crucifixion, until we arrive at another garden, a garden which holds a tomb. The women, Mary Magdalen, James’ mother, Mary, and Salome, arrive with spices with which to honor Jesus’ body. They arrive, already clothed in sorrow, shocked to see the stone door of the tomb rolled back. They approach the entrance.

The doorway to memories, for in the Greek the word for tomb is also the word for monument or memorial or any visible object which preserves the memory of a person or thing. The tomb is a place of memory. Imagine the memories that must have flooded their minds as they drew near: the people Jesus had healed, the hope he had given, the fierceness of his passion. As they step through this doorway, they expect to encounter death. What they find is life!

For Mark once again offers us a neaniskos, a young man (not an angel as in Matthew and John), inside the tomb. Should we imagine him to be, as Dr. Trost suggests, the same neaniskos whom we encountered in Gethsemane? Why not? Having experienced life’s triumph over death, he waits to share the good news. No longer naked, he is now wrapped, not in burial clothes, but in a white robe, the robe of royalty, the robe of priests, the robe of dignity, the robe of life. It is, writes Trost, “the white robe of resurrection.” And we can imagine the early Christian community, preparing new believers for baptism on Easter morning, sharing this story from Mark, and inviting them to see themselves rising from the waters, wrapped in this same beautiful cloth.

The neaniskos speaks to the women as an angel would speak, trying to calm their fear. He knows why they are there, and he says to them, “You are looking for Jesus, the Nazarene who was crucified. He has been raised. He is not here.” (16:6) We lose something powerful in translation. The word “crucified,” writes Rev. Rob Myallis, is not “simply a past action but a present state…in a cosmic sense [Jesus] is still in the state of being crucified…the risen Christ has holes in his hands.”[[5]](#endnote-5) And so the wounded healer rises, yet never the same. The scars remain as reminder, as testimony.

“Tell the disciples – and include Peter – Jesus will meet them in Galilee. Include Peter, who is not beyond God’s love no matter what he said or did.” The disciples, weary from stress and grief cannot rest, for a four-day journey awaits them. (That is, if some of them hadn’t already headed for home!) They will set out not knowing what they will find, but when they get there, they will remember what they have been called to do. When they get to Galilee, they will be back on solid ground, the place where Jesus based his ministry. “Going back to Galilee,” writes Rev. Phillip Ruge- Jones, “means going back to the margins where Jesus ministered and encountering him again feeding the hungry, driving out the demons that torment people, preaching words of hope to the broken-hearted, healing those in distress, and breaking down the barrier walls that separate people.”[[6]](#endnote-6)

Jesus does not send them out alone. Never alone. He goes ahead to meet them there and urge them on. Is it terrifying? Yes, of course! Is it bewildering and amazing? Yes and yes! Like those women at the tomb on Easter morning, we may not be able to put our eyes on the risen Christ, we may not get to hear his voice, but we too receive the good news and are assured that Jesus meets us whenever we step out in vulnerability and faith, risk taking disciples. The bandages and tools we carry may seem small in the light of the world’s brokenness, but little by little, we can uncover the wounds, and bring our spices of healing. For death does not get the final word.

Do you remember back in Genesis…God did this very merciful thing after the first people made a choice to disobey. When they hid in shame, scripture tells us that God made clothes for them. God made leather and took that leather and made them clothes. Clothes to protect them and shelter them. For that is God’s longing – to always lead us from shame to hope, to enable us to go back out into the world.

What clothing will you wear this day? Together, let us shed our burial clothes, wrap the resurrection robes around our shoulders and go out to seek Jesus. Let us, too, run from death to life. We might just find salvation along the way. Thanks be to God.

Christ is risen! The Lord is risen indeed! Amen. Alleluia.

1. Levine, Amy-Jill. *Entering the Passion of Jesus*, (p. 138). Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2018. Kindle Edition. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Trost, Theodore. https://www.academia.edu/43107903/A\_Portrait\_of\_the\_Young\_Man\_Neaniskos\_as\_Hero\_in\_the\_Gospel\_of\_Mark. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. De Jong, Patricia., “Mark 14: 43 – 52,” Feasting *on the Gospels: Mark*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2014. P. 480. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. [Lectionary Greek: Mark 16:1-8 (Easter)](http://lectionarygreek.blogspot.com/2012/04/mark-161-8.html), Myallis, Rob. 2012. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Ruge-Jones, Philip. [Commentary on Mark 16:1-8 - Working Preacher from Luther Seminary](https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/resurrection-of-our-lord-2/commentary-on-mark-161-8-6), 2018. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)