Text: Mark 16:1-8

**Introduction**

The Easter story according to the Gospel of Mark is unique. If you looked it up in a physical bible you’d notice that Mark technically doesn’t end at 16:8, but that everything after is marked in double brackets. It says “the earliest manuscripts do not include 16:9-20. Now don’t let that disturb you too much. 16:9-20 is basically a summary of what comes next cribbed from Matthew. What apparently happened is somewhere rather early people thought that this ending to gospel was too abrupt or inappropriate.

“They went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were terrified.”

Give me a time machine and forget about killing Hitler, the first thing I’m doing is figuring out if that was Mark’s intend ending, or if somehow we lost the original ending. But in either case scribes decided to cribbed Matthew. Just in case people didn’t know the rest of the story.

But that ending of Easter with the Mary’s and Salome running from the tomb silently in fear is unique.

**Trouble in the World**

But I tend to think it is exactly what Mark intended and exactly what we in our day need to ponder. Because if nothing else we are saturated with fear. And in all of these examples I’m about to parade out, I’m not making a valid or invalid judgement about that fear. I’m just citing everything that we are told…instructed…warned…not sure the right word…but everything that stokes our fear.

Be afraid if your guy doesn’t win the election. Be afraid of global warming and rising seas. Be afraid of the medical establishment. Be afraid of crime. Be afraid of terrorists. Be afraid of Russia, China, Iran. Be afraid of losing war. Be afraid of losing your job. Be afraid of dating. Be afraid of getting married. Be afraid of having kids. Be afraid of buying a house. Be afraid of not buying a house. Be afraid of technology. Be afraid of falling behind on technology. It seems to me – and I’m a news junkie, a hazzard of the job, afraid of not being relevant – but it seems to me that new reasons to be afraid are the purpose of the night’s newscast. Or a good portion of the social media stream. Every other Nextdoor posting is “stranger walking down the street, be afraid.” That’s different type of fear though, quite local, compared to the typical national fears paraded on the other socials. But still pitching fear.

And maybe this is lurking around in the background of all of those. I think the two great fears of all of those are first, our fear of not being in control, and then the biggest one fear of death itself. Or maybe loss of control leads to death.

**Gospel in the Text**

Now I want this Easter morning to address those in reverse order. Fear of death first. That is obviously not why the Mary’s and Salome are running from the tomb. Jesus had predicted his death and his resurrection multiple times. And I don’t have a slam-dunk verse to quote, but the women that followed Jesus in the gospels seem to have an easier time hearing this than the male disciples. The women do things like anoint Jesus, while the men complain about the extravagance. The men flee, not long after pledging they would never do that, while the women follow all along the route to the cross – “Do not weep for me, women of Jerusalem, weep for yourselves…” – and they are found watching at the cross. The story told would seem to be that the women heard it and understood a bit more. Although that doesn’t mean they believed all of it. The Mary’s and Salome are going to the tomb to anoint the dead man. They are not afraid of death. They only have the minor worry of who will roll away the stone.

Now I could be fantastically off here. And I think we’ve pushed back considerably the age at when this might happen. But fear of death is something that if you get to a certain age, you just are reconciled to it. Not that the unknown – that existential angst – can’t creep up on anybody. But if you grew up being told to be afraid of the bomb that could fall at any time, and duck and cover was your temporal hope, you made your peace.

And in any case the proclamation of Easter is “He’s risen.” As the hymn says, “death no longer can appall me.” And this is one of the places where I find apologetics helpful. The resurrection is the best attributed event of the ancient world. Based on how we judge historical reliability, nothing beats Easter morning. Not even Julius Caesar, the most famous man other than Jesus in the ancient world. There are multiple separate accounts from closer to the event that first of any other event. Those accounts include witnesses that the ancient would have said were unreliable – like the Mary’s and Salome. Those accounts include the witness of the high born and officers – Joseph of Arimathea and the Roman guards posted who were instructed to lie. The tomb was empty, there was no body, and Jesus would appear multiple times to as many as 500 people. And those 500 people would over time spill out into the entire world proclaiming “He is risen.” Absolute foolishness. Especially in the face of their death as most of them were threatened. Yet they continued proclaiming “He is risen.” Like they had no fear of death.

Because as the young man – the angel – says to the Mary’s and Salome, “Do not be afraid. You seek Jesus, the crucified, He’s not here, he’s risen…just as he told you.”

**Trouble in the Text**

Now at that is where the trouble in the text actually starts. When the women hear **that**, is when they run from the tomb.

Now I think this is a perfect spot to bring back that second great fear. The fear of not being in control. And I’m sorry to tell you, none of us are in control.

It would seem like everyday life would make this abundantly clear to all of us. But, we have an amazing capacity for denial. Every day we seem to get up, and then get afraid of not being in control. Be that from little superstitious acts that we hope reassert some cosmic control to full blown panic attacks.

But I think compared to our rather mundane confrontation with lack of control, the Mary’s and Salome are confronted with the megillah of “not being in control”. They are present to anoint a dead man. And if there is one thing we know, dead people don’t move. They don’t get up. But they walk into the tomb where Jesus was laid and they meet a young man who tells them – “This formerly dead guy, He’s is not here. He’s moved. He’s risen, just like he told you he would. He’s in control, even over death. He’s risen, and he’s got something for you to do. Go tell his disciples and Peter.”

They are definitely not in control.

**Gospel in the World**

Let me suggest that this is the bigger problem with the gospel. This is the crisis that everyone has to face. I don’t think we have that big a problem reconciling that fear of death. Even if you thought that death is just the end, there is some consolation in that. I won’t be here, LOL - nothing really matters. It lets us off the hook.

But being confronted with “He’s risen, and He’s got something for you to do.” That floods meaning back into all of existence. And not just temporal existence, but eternity. As the old pop song had it, “would you want to see, if seeing meant that you had to believe.” And of course believing means admitting that I am not in control.

The first time any of us are confronted with that – I think most of us “flee, for trembling and astonishment.”

And that is where Mark’s gospel leaves us. We with the Mary’s and Salome have to decide when the jitters are over, what are we going to do. What are we going to believe?

Is the empty tomb just something that we can deny? You be amazed at our capacity for denial. How quickly it never happened.

I assume that Mark knew his readers knew the rest of the Mary’s and Salome’s story. They of course eventually overcome their silence and tell Peter, or at least Mary Magdalene does. The reason we are reading his story is because someone told. But Mark leaves us in the same position as the women that day. Are we going to live in fear of not being in control?

Or are we going to take comfort. Take comfort in this. That no, we are not in control, but we know who is. He’s risen. The powers that be are vanquished. Satan’s arrows broken lie. Death is no longer our prison. The tomb is empty. And the one who is in control has something for us to do.

The crucified and risen one wants you. Stop fearing. He’s in control. Even over death. And it is all for the good of his people.