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Mark 16:1-8

When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. They had been saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?” When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, “Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.” So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

“Choose Your Own Adventure”

That can't be it, can it? Fear? Is that really the last word of this story? Is that the good news we all came here to hear this morning? The women run away and told no one because they were afraid?!?

If you look in your pew Bible you will see there are two other attempts to bring the story to a more satisfactory close. The short one is called the shorter ending and the long one is *imaginatively* named the longer ending.

Scholars almost universally agree that both were add-ons of later editors who weren't comfortable with ending at verse 8. But they are not sure if Mark intended to end the Gospel at verse 8 or if it was somehow lost.

The Gospels, like all scripture and all writing at the time, were on scrolls not pages. This made them easier to roll up and transport. But if you think about it, which part is the most vulnerable to damage? The end.

Even if verse 8 is where Mark intends to leave it, we know that it is not the end of the story. How do we know? Well, we are here, right?

I mean, someone had to say something. We wouldn't be here if that was the last word. So the effect of the ending is to let us know that fear is NOT the last word. The story doesn't end there even though the writing does.

When I was young there was a series of books known as Choose Your Own Adventure. How many of you remember those? Written from a second person perspective, when the narrative comes to a fork in the road, you are asked to make a choice. If you choose A, you turn to one page and the narrative continues. If you choose B, you turn to another page and the narrative follows a different course.

I was not a big reader as a child. That may surprise those of you who know how much I love books now, but at the time I would rather watch TV. For me, the Choose Your Own Adventure books grabbed me in a way that no other had before. I was part of the story. I was able to imagine myself in the adventure. My choices mattered. They affected the outcome of the narrative. I could read a book one time and make one set of choices, then read it again making different choices and it was completely different conclusion.

I think of Mark as the Choose Your Own Adventure Gospel. Whether or not the Gospel writer intended to conclude at verse 8, I can't think of a better place to end the Gospel than there. It has the effect of inviting us into the story.

Let's put ourselves in the women's place as they head to the tomb. They are grieving, but more than that they are hopeless. They had put all of their hope and trust on Jesus. They thought he was the one to save him and now... Now what?

Rob Bell asks, "If you had witnessed this divine life extinguished on a cross how would you not be overwhelmed with despair? Is the world ultimately a cold, hard, dead place? Does death have the last word? Is it truly, honestly, actually dark and so whatever light we do see whatever good we do stumble upon are those just blips on the radar? Momentary interruptions in an otherwise meaningless existence?"

After finding the tomb empty, Mark tells us that terror and amazement seized the women. Terror *and* amazement! Both together. Did you notice that? They have to decide which to trust: their fear or their amazement? Death or the empty tomb?

Our presence here this morning testifies to the choice the women made. They decided on resurrection, which is not the end of the story but the beginning of a whole new one.

"Resurrection," Rob Bell says, "announces that God has not given up on the world because this world matters, this world that God is redeeming and restoring and renewing. Resurrection says that what we do with our lives matters; in this body the one that we inhabit right now. Every act of compassion matters. Every work of art that celebrates the good and the true matters. Every fair and honest act of business and trade. Every kind word. They all belong and they will all go on in God's good world. Nothing will be forgotten. Nothing will be wasted. It all has its place. Every glimmer of good, every hint of hope, every impulse that elevates the soul is a sign, a taste, a glimpse of how things actually are and how things will ultimately be. Resurrection affirms this life and the next as a seamless reality: embraced, graced and saved by God."

When we come to the Lord's Table to celebrate communion we proclaim it as a sign, a taste, a glimpse of how things actually are and how things will ultimately be. Here we claim the living presence of our Lord, in ordinary bread and juice. And here, among us as well.

Here we are fed for our own adventures, because what we do with our lives, we are part of God's ongoing story. Daily we choose between death and resurrection...which do we believe has the last word? How does that belief shape our actions and the quality of our lives?

“Every life is lived toward a horizon, a distant vision of what lies ahead,” writes Parker Palmer in his book *The Active Life*. “The quality of our action depends heavily on whether that horizon is dark with death or full of light and life. When we imagine ourselves moving toward the finality of death, our action may become deformed. We may become paralyzed, unable to act freely. We may become driven by fear, obsessed with protecting and preserving what we have, which is a sure way of losing it...But when we envision a horizon that holds the hope of life, we are free to act without fear, free to act in truth and love and justice today because those very qualities seem to shape our own destiny.”

I like that. I think that is what Mark's story of Easter provides us with: not an ending, but a horizon, a choice. We get to live our lives toward the horizon of our own choosing.

Maybe you came here today unconvinced of new life and new possibilities. Maybe you no longer believe that your choices are important, that they matter. Maybe you are beginning to lose hope that there is something more to all of this. Maybe you are afraid that death gets the last word. Maybe you came here thinking the Easter story is like every other story we read in a books. The conclusion is already written, decided by someone else.

But this is not that kind of a story. This is a Choose Your Own Adventure story. We are a part of it. Remember that great line from Walt Whitman, “...the powerful play goes on, and you will contribute a verse.”

We get to choose, fear or amazement, death or resurrection, and our choices matter...not just for us...not just for our future, but for the quality of our actions here and now, because what we believe about the world matters.

The good news of Easter is that God invites us to envision a horizon of hope, light and new possibilities.

The good news of Easter is that no matter how dark, how desperate how full of death and fear our world has become, we can still choose hope, we can choose love, we can choose justice, we can choose kindness, and we can choose new life. We can live into God's resurrection reality, where death and fear do not get the last word, because at every end is the chance to begin again. Thanks be to God!