

## FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

East Moline, Illinois

Pastor Becky Sherwood

**March 31, 2024, Easter Sunday**

Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24, Mark 16:1-8

**Now What?**

“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.” (Mark 16:8)

Terror and amazement?

They said nothing to anyone?

They were afraid?

This isn't really the Easter story you were expecting this morning, is it? If you want the story you are used to hearing you need to go to the gospels of Matthew, Luke or John, but Mark tells the story another way. A shorter story, a story that leaves us asking, but then what happened?

Mark's tell is raw with the emotion of those women, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome who had seen too much in three short days.

On Friday at 9 in the morning Jesus had been crucified, he had been nailed to the cross and it had been erected there at Golgotha and his clothes had been divided among the soldiers.

Jesus their teacher, the healer, the one they knew to be the Messiah was there on the cross, covered in blood from being flogged by the Roman soldiers.

Flogging meant he had been tied to a post and a whip with metal pieces or bone woven into the leather strips had been used to whip him, before he was nailed to the cross.

The women stood at a distance and saw him on the cross, standing with many other women who had traveled up with Jesus to Jerusalem (Mark 15:41)

Then at noon, darkness came over the whole land until 3 in the afternoon.

At 3 in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” And with a loud cry he breathed his last

And the curtain in the temple that separated God from humanity was torn in two from top to bottom. A Roman Centurian who stood facing the cross saw all of this as Jesus breathed his last and said: “Truly this man was God's son!”

Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome saw all of this, and then since it was nearly the Sabbath Joseph of Arimathea was given permission to take the body of Jesus down and he was wrapped in a cloth and buried in a tomb and a large stone was rolled in front of it. Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of Joseph saw there the body was laid.

And then it was the sabbath, Friday sundown to Saturday sundown, and the disciples were hidden away in the upper room in fear. We aren't told if the women were there with them, but they too were hidden away.

We who have known grief can begin to imagine what they were feeling. But we have never stood at the foot of a cross. We have never looked at the bloodied body of the Messiah, flesh torn apart by the metal hooks and bones at the end of leather cords. We have never believed that we have been taught by the Son of God who has come to save us, and then seen his broken, crucified body rolled in a linen cloth and buried in a tomb.

So, we can only imagine what the disciples and the other women and men who followed Jesus were feeling. Even catching a glimpse of what the women were feeling is devastating beyond words. We know the heartache of losing those we love.

We don't know the heartache of losing the Messiah who our Jewish ancestors had longed for, for hundreds and hundreds of years.

We don't know the devastation of meeting the Messiah that our Prophets foretold, watching him feed the hungry, heal the sick, liberate the possessed, teach those longing to hear about the Kingdom of God, and welcome sinners, tax collectors and women just like they were as valued as everyone else.

We just can barely imagine what they felt.

Then early in the morning, devastated beyond words, grieving, but still wanting to care for Jesus by bringing spices to anoint his body,

Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome, went to Jesus' tomb, worrying about the very large stone rolled across the entrance to the tomb,

But the stone was rolled away, and an angel in a white robe was sitting inside the tomb and they were of course alarmed because the tomb was empty. How could their hearts take any more upsetting news?

And the angel said: "Don't 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."

And Mark's Gospel ends right there. That's all he wrote.

Later people thought there should be more and so they added more verses in later years. But most scholars agree that this is what Mark wrote, this is what Mark wanted us to know. End of story, 8 short verses.

And when we think about what these women had been through in just Friday, Saturday and early Sunday morning, is it any wonder that their first, most truly human response, was terror and amazement, silence and fear?

Would any of us have done anything more or less than them? They fled, in terror and amazement and didn't tell anyone for they were afraid.

And that is the end of the story. This is what Mark wants I to know.

We know of course from other gospels that Jesus went ahead of them to Galilee which was the home base of the disciples. It was where Jesus' ministry had begun. It was also the base of the spread of the Good News story of Jesus' life, death and resurrection going out into the world.

We know that the women's silence isn't the end of the story because here we are this morning, you and me, followers of this risen Savior Jesus who went to Galilee, ahead of those women and the disciples and met them there, and the world was never the same again.

But this isn't the way that Mark is telling us the story this morning, is it? He ends the story with the women running away in fear and silence. Honest emotion in response to three days of terror, heartbreak, devastation, and then surprising news that they just couldn't take in at first.

Mark ends his Good News story in silence.

He was telling the story of Jesus the Savior of the world,  
and when he ends the story in silence,  
he is handing the story to all of us who hear him,  
asking us to speak the next part of the story.

Interpretation Bible Commentaries: Williamson, Lamar, Jr., Mark, Interpretation Series,  
Louisville: John Knox Press, 1983, p. 285-286

This Easter morning, we are being handed the story of Jesus the Savior of the World.  
The women are gone, we have heard about the risen Savior, so what happens next?  
Because now Jesus is going before us to our homes, to our Galilees, to our places where the  
Good News story spreads from.

We have been handed the Easter story this morning.

Jesus goes before us, beckoning us to follow him onward,  
The story is ours to live and to tell!  
What will happen next? Amen.