

Back to Galilee

Acts 10: 34-43

Mark 16: 1-8

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Easter Sunday

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Acts 10: 34-43

Then Peter began to speak to them: “I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all. That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

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.

Grief. Sorrow. Sadness. Somber. Shock. Terror. Afraid, and then confusion.

On this joyous morning of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, those are not words we associate with this day. We hear trumpets and triumph. We hear Alleluias and angelic cheers. We feel redemption, rebirth and renewal. We feel love, light and life. Yet for the women—Mary, Mary Magdalene and Salome—they began this morning prepared to anoint, to care for, the lifeless corpse of the One so beloved by them. They worried about the massive stone across his tomb, yet were eager and determined to offer Jesus this one last gift, this last bit of loving care, that they could.

Where they had anticipated to find only death, they were the first to find resurrection. Greeted by an angelic messenger who in an overwhelmingly simple statement seeks to calm them as he tenderly assures them that Jesus has been raised, has been resurrected, just as he said

he would be. He encourages them to go and tell the disciples—even Peter who had denied knowing him--- that they were to go back to Galilee where he was waiting for them.

That is all that Mark seems to have left us; a messenger with a simple travel instruction. This feels so inadequate, so incomplete, so hollow. Life has come from death, Jesus has risen, but there is no fanfare, no encounters with the risen Christ. Unlike the other gospels there is no conversation with two grieving travelers on the road to Emmaus, no earthquake, no gardener to call anyone by name, no doubting Thomas, no commissioning of the disciples to carry on his work.

Yet oddly enough, for Mark this may be the perfect ending to his gospel. This gospel, the first written one, was for the earliest Christians who were being persecuted and martyred. Focusing on the cross was encouragement for those who followed the Way of Jesus, even into death. Our earliest faith ancestors knew from the disciples, from the actual witnesses, who taught in the oral tradition, about the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Mark's vivid, concise and concrete gospel offered the first whole story of Jesus' life, ministry, death and resurrection. It offered them hope, encouragement and direction. Go back to Galilee. Meet Jesus there just as he had said.

Go back to the beginning. Go back to where it all began. Go back to Galilee, to Nazareth, where Jesus grew up, where he taught in the synagogue, where he was rejected by those who had known him and his family, where he was baptized and soon called his disciples from their hometowns. Go back to Galilee, to Capernaum, where Jesus taught and where he healed, go back to where he resurrected new life out of the ashes of leprosy, blindness, paralysis, injustice, hunger, rejection, and isolation. Go back to Galilee where water became wine, where thousands were fed from a bit of fish and bread, where Jesus offered the moral blessings and woes of the Sermon on the Mount.

Go back to Galilee where Jesus had tried and tried to have the disciples see who he truly was, but they could not. They could not understand the One who could calm the storm, could walk on water, who spoke in parables and metaphors, who was transfigured on the mountain in a pivotal moment of revelation, nor One who said he would suffer, die and rise again. Go back to Galilee where Peter rebuked Jesus when he talked about suffering and dying. Go back to Galilee where Jesus promised to raise up the destroyed temple in three days, to where he offered spiritual rebirth, where he asked us to remember him in the breaking of the bread and the sharing of the cup. Go back to Galilee and see that the Messiah is not a conquering hero, but the Son of God sent to share our common lot, conquer sin and death and reconcile the world.

Go back not in a sentimental, nostalgic way, but now as people who have been living in darkness on whom a great light has shined. Now in the light of Jesus' resurrection, go back and see the whole story in light of its ending. Head back to the site of his life and ministry among us, go back out into the world where we are promised that he has gone ahead of us. Go back to the beginning in order to see and to understand the end.

For Mark, this gospel ending was just right for his original audience. Could this simple ending also be right for us as well? Adult Faith Formation leader Brian Purfield suggests that it is. He says that, "This is where we live: after the resurrection but before the return, entrusted with a message that is wonderful, but the import of which we do not quite understand. If we are honest with ourselves, this is the space most of us inhabit."

We are not always sure just what to make of the resurrection. We are not always sure of just how everything changed because of the week that changed the world. Yet we have this same good news, this great news. Through Mark's gospel we have the same instruction, to go back to

Galilee and meet Jesus there. "...he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you." For us to go back to Galilee begins with going back to our baptism, to our own beginning, to the meaning of our baptism, in which we first joined Jesus Christ in life, death and resurrection, and so were touched with grace for the journey ahead to Galilee.

Where is our Galilee? Galilee does not have to be a particular place, a set geography, for us. It may be a situation we face, a choice we need to make, a plan we must consider, a frame of mind by which we live. Our particular Galilee could be the bleak reality of physical, emotional, or spiritual pain. It could be shattered expectations, dashed hopes, broken promises, or damaged relationships. It could be the wear and tear, the fragmented lifestyles, the exhaustion and frustrations of living through more than a year of a pandemic.

"Whatever it is, the joy-filled and hope-filled message of Easter is the promise made to us that Christ is not only there when we arrive, he has gone ahead of us, to that desolate place, so that we might have loving arms in which to fall at journey's end." (Brian Purfield)