

“Hungry For Good News” – Mk 16:1-8 – Easter Sunday, 2012

When Ted finished the gospel reading this morning, did any of you feel that somehow it wasn't enough, that you expected, even wanted, more? I mean, he barely got started with the events of the resurrection, and BAM! it was over. That account of the resurrection seems to be missing something, doesn't it? Missing even a lot of something, and it leaves you feeling unsatisfied, incomplete. Now if you did feel that you somehow wanted more, then know that you are not alone, because not only do many others today feel that way, there is much evidence that early Christians felt much the same way also.

What we heard from Mark's gospel today is where Mark's gospel is generally considered to have originally ended. The earliest manuscripts of this earliest of the gospels show that this is it, this is all he wrote. Mark's account of the story of Jesus has no Christmas story and the briefest of Easter accounts. Several women discover the tomb has been opened, one young man is inside to give them a message that Jesus has been raised, he is not there, he has gone to Galilee. Instead of following the next instruction to tell the others, the women say nothing to anyone. Not a very satisfying ending to an incredible story of healing, compassion, and declaration that the kingdom of God is near. The story ends abruptly here, leaving us hanging with a “to be continued” feeling. We want more, more details, more description of what followed. We are left hungry for more of the good news.

We experience that same hungering for good news in today's world, don't we? Heaven knows there is enough bad news to go around – entire cable networks exist for no other reason than to bring us the bad news non-stop 24x7. Most of those networks even seem more than willing to manufacture bad news through speculation if there isn't enough to report. To be sure, they do sprinkle in a few tidbits of good news like chocolate chips, hoping to keep us longing for more so we'll sit through the regular stuff, but those items are usually not much more than teasers. We are still left hungry for good news and waiting to see if we'll hear some.

The early Christians wanted to hear more, and they got to hear more. More details of the events following the resurrection of Jesus were added to Mark's account in the final twelve verses, including even a briefest of references to the ascension of Jesus into heaven. But even the accounts added here were also brief, and left the faithful hungry for more of the good news.

Later gospel writers heard and acknowledged that hunger, and both Matthew and Luke provided more details and fuller accounts of what happened following that first Easter morning. In Matthew not only do the women go to tell the others, Jesus met them on their way, and himself gave them the message that he was going ahead to Galilee. In Galilee the disciples also encountered him, and received the profound assurance that he would be with them always, to the end of the age. Luke is able to recount even more accounts of the risen Christ meeting with people, not only the two on the road to Emmaus but also with the disciples still gathered in Jerusalem. John also seeks to satisfy the hunger for good news with even more details, including a second appearance in Jerusalem to satisfy Thomas' hunger.

How do we react to recognizing that the story seemed to swell and grow with each retelling? Are we to be suspicious, or can we realize that the stories were gathered from other witnesses and included to satisfy the growing hunger for more about the good news of Jesus Christ? Just as we have differing details in accounts in the gospels of the events of the crucifixion so too can we expect differing details among the resurrection accounts. It seems clear that all who were involved in the resurrection events were completely “all shook up” and the gospel authors would have access to different witnesses and so their stories would be different in the details. Matthew's account seems to have been coloured by the accounts of the guards; John seems at least in my mind to have had access to Mary or at least Mary's telling of the story; Luke hears the good

news with an emphasis on the good news being not just for Jews but for the whole world. In any event, we have differing versions, and I believe we are blessed by those differences.

And yet while there are differences, there are similarities and a thread of commonality that runs through both of these versions, and that common thread forms the foundation of our Christian faith. All of the gospel authors include angelic beings in their accounts, and while the quotes are different, it is obvious that these angelic beings were there both to support Jesus in this defining moment and to proclaim to others that what had happened was clearly God's doing. Their very presence and appearing to 'common' people like guards and compassionate followers of Jesus was a heavenly sign that this rising again of Jesus from the dead was an event that would touch the lives of all people.

Another thread that weaves through these accounts is that it was women who were the first to encounter Jesus. Whether it was the "don't touch me yet" of John's gospel, or the clutching of Jesus' feet in Matthew's, it was the women who are the first of the followers of Jesus to be greeted by him, and to receive the first of the marching orders that would follow over the next two thousand years. "Go, tell my brothers, tell the others" Jesus tells them, go tell them the good news that death had been conquered in this momentous earth-shaking event. They were all shook up by this holy event – the guards, the women, the other disciples. Finding it difficult to believe, even though they saw him with their own eyes, touched him with their own hands, ate and drank with him, they nevertheless recovered from their confusion, and proceeded to tell the whole world the good news.

We still hunger for good news and the good news is, of course, the event that we rejoice in and celebrate today – the rising again of Jesus, victorious over even death. The cross upon which he died is now empty, and so is the tomb into which he was tenderly placed after the brutal crucifixion. Rejoicing and worship has replaced the tears and anguish of grieving. In that moment of greeting his followers all of the promises Jesus made were affirmed: the affirmation that he will be with us even unto the end of the age; the promise of life everlasting and abundant; the assurance that the Holy Spirit would be sent to continue to guide, comfort, and uplift all who place their trust in Christ's redeeming power. Over and done is the quaking of the guards and the confused excitement of the women and other disciples, replaced by the solid assurance of God's never-ending love made so clear in Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, our risen Lord.

Once again on this highest of holy days in our Christian faith we gather to celebrate and rejoice with the women of faith who discovered the empty tomb and the angels and who were first greeted with "rejoice, be glad" by the risen Jesus. We join with them and with the other disciples in "coming and seeing" the empty tomb. We devour the stories of how they walked and talked and ate with the risen Jesus, and all that he had said and done during those few brief years began to come clearer and started to make sense, and the awareness became complete that this Jesus truly was the incarnation of God's redeeming love.

Throughout the two thousand years that have passed since that dramatic morning that left everyone "all shook up" others have joined in the procession of proclaiming the good news of the empty cross and empty tomb and of trying to understand the full meaning of what Christ's saving action has meant for the world. And today we also join that procession, hearing and retelling the glorious story of that first Easter morning, celebrating with great joy and thanksgiving the certainty that in the Resurrection of Christ lies our assurance also of God's everlasting covenant of grace with us, that in our belief, in our faith we too have received the gifts of life abundant and eternal. There is no more appropriate day in our lives to shout "Halleluia!" – I say again and invite you to join with me – "Halleluia!" and to give thanks to God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.