

“The Consequence of Saying Nothing”

Mark 16:1-8 – April 12, 2009

INTRO: Each of our four Gospels has a story about the resurrection, but they are all a little different. Biblical scholars argue whether Mark’s version originally ended where it does. Scribes created two additional endings for this Gospel, which we find in our Bibles, but neither of which are believed to be original. Some theorize that the scroll on which this Gospel was written, became worn and frayed at the end, and the last words may have been lost. Others believe that maybe a scroll was lost or misplaced. Maybe someday we’ll find a scroll that is the original ending to Mark. Regardless, these 8 verses I read today, leave us with a kind of unfinished ending, an ending that’s not an ending, so listen carefully.

Sometimes we can get mesmerized by the strangest things. There is a frozen chicken commercial regularly running, which has a fellow coming home after a long day, and opening the refrigerator door. He’s just staring into that refrigerator—you know the feeling, when you are looking for something to eat and not finding anything. And his wife quickly assesses the situation, and instructs the children: “Your father’s in a refrigerator coma. Preheat the oven.” The children follow her instructions, and in just a few seconds of TV time, the father comes to life and says: “Broccoli and cheese, let’s eat!”

I’ve found it’s not just refrigerators that flip us into on-hold, coma mode, but it can be: The person who stands looking into their closet and says they have nothing to wear. Or the young person who goes through the pile of DVD’s and tells us there is nothing good to watch. Sometimes we get stuck and can’t seem to move forward.

The Gospel of Mark, opens with good news. It says, “The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” (vs. 1). And the last verse of the last chapter, which I just read, says: the women were “stunned and they said nothing to anyone.” The women were stunned, they were stuck, they were maybe mesmerized and couldn’t share what they’d seen.

It’s interesting that we speak of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ as good news, news we would want to tell each other, yet when the women came to the tomb, they left quickly, “as fast as they could, beside themselves, their heads swimming.” The women lose their nerve, and even after the angel instructs them to go and tell the others what they’ve seen, they do nothing.

To be honest, Mark is not my favorite version of the Easter story. I think of all the women I’ve known, who have been the truth-tellers, and the story tellers, the ones who say what really happened in a situation. And now we have these three women clamming up. Like another TV commercial says, “It’s just not natural!”

We don’t know why they lost their nerve, or why they “were beside themselves.” Perhaps because they were women living in a very patriarchal culture, they thought they wouldn’t be credible witnesses anyway. Or maybe some would have said they were crazy. Or others might accuse them of taking the body and burying it someplace else.

Even though this account doesn’t admit to the women telling the story, other accounts do say that, and we know that someone told the story, because we’re all here today. Maybe they went home and thought about it for awhile, and then shared the news.

The women’s stunned response may surprise us, but it also may move us to think about our own struggle to find news that is good enough to share, in a world that is too often overflowing with pain and bad news. “The Middle East is in utter disarray. North Korea hates South Korea and vice versa. AIDS is devastating much of Africa. The European Union is disgusted about U.S. foreign policies.”(Tracey Lind)

As a nation, and world, we are struggling with tough economic realities. In our country, we have a healthcare system that leaves too many without care, we face difficult decisions around immigration issues, and we have a population that is aging while the base to support those aging persons gets smaller and smaller. We may not be particularly fearful of good news, as much as we are overtaken or stunned by the continual bad news. We may become so stuck in what’s wrong, that we lose any perspective that could help us think clearly.

I read a story that some claim is true. A man was standing in line at a bank when there was a commotion at the counter. A woman was distressed, exclaiming, “Where will I put my money? I have all my money and my mortgage here!! What will happen to my mortgage?!” It turned out that the woman had misunderstood a small sign on the counter which said: WE WILL BE CLOSED FOR

GOOD FRIDAY. She thought that the bank was going to close “for good,” to close permanently that coming Friday. She was beside herself and overtaken with worry—worried about something that in fact wasn’t even grounded in reality.

Eugene Peterson says: “Even though we are surrounded and threatened by death, we are to be participants and witnesses to life. We are to (communicate to others) the connectedness and the preciousness of life, to engage in the practice of resurrection in the country of death.” (*Living the Resurrection*)

“Resurrection is an experience born in the depths of death and despair. It’s a place filled with hope, the hope of new beginnings and possibilities.” (Tracey Lind)

Like those women, we may have gotten stunned into silence. Yet, my experience tells me that in the midst of painful or sad or terrible experiences, we may eventually gain some perspective that gives us resurrection stories to tell, if we would choose to tell them. When I was serving the church in Greenfield, I began to have migraine headaches. They lasted for six months. I went to all sorts of doctors, had various tests, and finally found a savvy internist who determined they were hormonally related. I couldn’t tolerate the prescribed meds, so the doctor told me I would just need to tough it out for awhile but she thought things would get better. On Easter morning, after six months of regular headaches, the migraines ended. I have no specific scientific data to explain why, but let me tell you on that morning, I had a whole new understanding of resurrection and new life, and a story I could share.

I know of an older woman who through much of her life struggled with depression. Her husband was the optimist in that family, and he was the one who traveled all over the world, and encouraged his wife to join him—but she usually didn’t. Her husband suddenly got cancer and died, and obviously that was a very difficult time. One of her goals was to begin to do some things for herself, and she challenged herself to go on an Elder Hostel—by herself—and she did it! And she enjoyed it, and she continues to sign up for more of them. What a story of new life breaking in.

Sometimes a church prayer shawl ministry can be a path to new life. I was acquainted with someone who became active in her church’s prayer shawl group. Over the past few years, this person had struggled with the untimely death of her nephew in a helicopter accident in Iraq, and concern over her sister, her nephew’s mother. Knitting a prayer shawl for her sister was a way she could find some healing in this situation. And it became a kind of meditation for her—a way to learn to pray again. And even though she knits the shawl for someone else, she finds new life in the process.

I think of the older adult who needs more care and has had to move out of his home. And rather than finding this the worst thing that has ever happened to him, he has made friends with people in his assisted living apartments and he says he loves the food there. His perspective is that this is just another chapter of living, rather than something terrible and awful

If we are people who believe and have experienced that God brings new life and transformation out of awful or stagnant circumstances, we need to be more free to share those stories with each other. It doesn’t mean that everyone will have the same experience that we have—everybody’s health situation may not turn out well, everybody’s depression may not lift. But I don’t think we need to shy away from sharing our stories, which could possibly give someone else the hope that would keep them going.

We have had the experience of a Lord who is alive and working in us, and invites us to follow him, which means sharing good news. By telling the stories of the places in our own lives that new life happens, we can help those who are in the midst of a variety of grief experiences, or personal pain, or hopelessness, so that they might come to see that there can be something to move to, on the other side of grief or pain. Telling our stories can give all of us hope for the world and hope for the church. We can help those who are struggling, to know that the end of the story may not necessarily be awful.

“Perhaps Easter is lived in the ordinary places of life. It is lived when the fearful are comforted and the lonely are befriended. It is lived in places where justice is done, love abides and peace is the goal. Easter is the widow who understands that her husband is gone but knows somehow that he is going to be all right and so is she. Easter is the survivor of a divorce who is able to love again. Easter is the person struggling with alcoholism or drug addiction getting through another day without a drink or a smoke or a needle. Easter is being unemployed and having the energy to look for another job. Easter is working for a just peace wherever there is an unjust war. Easter knows

that somehow, some way, things are going to be all right. It is about more than surviving or bringing back the old or that which is dead; it's about living again and living anew." *(Interrupted by God-Glimpses from the Edge – Tracey Lind)*

Anne Lamott says: "Hope is about choosing to believe this one thing, that love is bigger than any grim, bleak (stuff) anyone can throw at us."

"The good news is that Christ is alive, saving people from a living death and offering life in all its fullness." *(Cynthia Campbell)*

But if the world is going to find this out, we've got to share the good news. The consequence of our silence means that bad news is pretty much what is heard—in the air waves, in the newspapers, in our homes, with our friends. Easter people believe that "good news trumps bad news every time and we want the world to know that." *(Homiletics 4/06)*

Easter people need to move through being stunned by life, being mesmerized, to find ways to more fully live. And we need many more of us to realize that our own personal stories of resurrection and new life might just be a wonderful resource for someone else. We need lots more of us to share with each other. It is said that the average congregation is like a basketball game where there are 10 players badly in need of rest and 1000 spectators badly in need of exercise. When it comes to sharing our stories of new life, are you in the 10 or the 1000? We need 1000 of us sharing the good news.

We wonder how those women could have remained silent on that first Easter morning? The better question for us might be—how can we remain silent for so long?

--Sue Burwell