

The Sunday of the Resurrection: Easter Day

April 4, 2021

By the Reverend Stephen Gerth

Year B: Acts 10:34–43; Psalm 118:14–17, 22–24; Colossians 3:1–4; Mark 16:1–8*

This morning, when I read Mark’s account of Jesus’ resurrection, I found myself thinking of the physical and emotional exhaustion of the men and women who were close to Jesus, who knew him as the “Teacher,” their “Master.” In Mark, Matthew, and Luke, we read that “many women” watched Jesus’ crucifixion from afar.¹ Mark names three, “Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome.”²

Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of [James and] Joses “saw where Jesus was laid.”³ When the sabbath ended, Mary Magdalene, the other Mary, and Salome bought spices to care for Jesus’ body in the morning.⁴

When these three go in the morning, the tomb is open. Inside, “They saw a young man . . . in a white robe . . . he said to them, “Do not be amazed; you seek Jesus of Nazareth . . . He has risen, he is not here . . . go, tell his disciples . . . he is going . . . to Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you.”⁵ The most ancient manuscripts of Mark end with these words, which Roman Catholic Christians—estimated to be half the Christians in the world⁶—are not permitted by their church to hear: “And [the women] went out and fled from the tomb; for trembling and astonishment had come upon them; and they said nothing to any one, for they were afraid.”⁷ If you have a good edition of the Bible, it will tell you that the last eight verses

¹ Mark 15:40; Matthew 27:55; Luke 23:49.

² Mark 15:40.

³ Mark 15:47.

⁴ Mark 16:1.

⁵ Mark 16:5–7.

⁶ <https://www.learnreligions.com/christianity-statistics-700533>, (accessed 4 April 2021).

⁷ Mark 16:8.

printed with Mark are not from the hand of the evangelist, though they may be other early recorded stories about the Lord.⁸

Matthew and Luke both know Mark's text—but one cannot tell from either of them what Mark's original ending may have been. That said, in Matthew, Jesus himself will meet them women and, I would agree with Ulrich Luz that his greeting to them should be translated as “Rejoice” and not as “Hail” or “Hello.” In Matthew, the women have already received the news “fear and great joy.”⁹ So the Risen Jesus changes their lives when he says, “Rejoice! . . . Do not be afraid.”¹⁰

To keep it interesting, the evangelist whom tradition calls Luke, who is the author also the author of the Acts of the Apostles, goes in an entirely different direction from Mark and Matthew. It is not back to Galilee, where Jesus' ministry was welcomed, but the Christian mission begins from Jerusalem. In Luke, Jesus meets two disciples on the road to Emmaus—they turn around and return to the city where they learn Jesus has also appeared to Simon. The evangelist continues, “As [the two disciples] were saying this, Jesus himself stood among them . . . [Jesus] said to them, ‘Why are you troubled, and why do questionings rise in your hearts?’ ”¹¹ Jesus tells them, “Stay in the city, until you are clothed with power from on high.”¹² And then he ascends to heaven, for the first, but not the last time in Luke's narratives.¹³

Last night, for my sermon quoted words from the late Aidan Kavanagh, a liturgical scholar who did great work as adult baptism began to take on new importance for many Christian communities, including our own. The words were these, “The liturgy . . . exists not to educate but to seduce

⁸ Joel Marcus, *Mark 8–16*, Anchor Bible 27A (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 1088–96.

⁹ Matthew 28:8.

¹⁰ Matthew 28:10. My punctuation.

¹¹ Luke 24:36–38.

¹² Luke 24:49.

¹³ Luke 24:51; Acts 1:1–11.

people into participating in common activity of the highest order, where one is freed to learn things which cannot be taught.”¹⁴

The usual title of address used by the disciples in Mark is Teacher, the Greek word *Didaskale*,—and if I have counted correctly, it is used thirteen times.¹⁵ He is addressed as “Rabbi”—meaning “master”—or in literally in Hebrew “my great one”—only four times.¹⁶

This morning I want to suggest that the variety of responses to Christ in the Gospel open the door to us remembering in how many different ways all of us have come to Christ.

It was as rector in Michigan City that I preached on Palm Sunday and on Easter Day from Mark for the first time—in 1990. Before then, I had not realized how abandoned Jesus was in Mark’s narrative. In the beginning of Mark, the demons cry out when Jesus silences them.¹⁷ On the cross, Jesus cries out. There is no amelioration of his situation. He is alone. There is no mention of his mother; Mark has no knowledge of a disciple Jesus loved. A few women look on from afar. I am among those who think we should take the evangelist’s words about Jesus’ death literally. After crying to his Father, “Why have you forsaken me?” he has no more words. He utters a loud cry and stops breathing. His agony, his death, is not the end of eternal life but the revelation of it for us.

Father Kavanagh, I think, was right. Jesus the teacher could not teach this except for a very few, the blind, the lepers, the lame, the hungry, a few parents of sick children, of children who had died, and a very few men and women who were so troubled by their sins that they sought him out. Here, at font, table, community, and at the death beds of others, we are free to

¹⁴ Aidan Kavanagh, *Elements of Rite: A Handbook of Liturgical Style* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Company, 1982), 28.

¹⁵ *A Concordance to the Greek Testament*, 4th rev. ed. (Edinburgh: T & T. Clark, 1963), *s.v.*, “*Διδάσκαλος*,” 208.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, *s.v.*, “*Ραββει*,” 880.

¹⁷ Mark 1:23–26.

learn things that give life eternal, things that cannot be taught but only encountered by God's grace.

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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