

When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint Jesus. 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.

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This is the first of the Great 50 Days of Pascha, of Easter, the season when we contemplate and celebrate the central claim and animating experience of Christianity. The very first words of the Easter Vigil liturgy are incredible: "On this most holy night, when our Lord Jesus Christ passed *from death to life...*"

And when we renew our baptismal vows, we say something equally astonishing: "Through the Paschal mystery," we say, "we have been buried *with Christ in Baptism into his death and raised with him to newness of life.*"

The combination is literally awesome. Not like a new iPhone is "awesome. Dude." Awesome as in mind-blowing. Awesome as in breath-taking. Awesome in the sense that it is a combination of truths so impressive that it may actually inspire wonder and fear.

God's *love itself* came to us in Christ Jesus, lived as one of us and died on account of us. And then passed from death to life. That alone is stunning. No wonder the three women at the tomb were seized by amazement and terror.

By itself, the story might have become folklore. Maybe it would even have inspired some wisdom that explained certain life events. But it's the rest of the Easter equation – the implications for our own lives –

that forever move this story out of the realm of ancient folklore about a magically empty tomb.

Folklore is fairly static. Mystical experiences evolve.

Reading the story about the empty tomb is like reading a recipe for blueberry pie. And it may even be amazing. But receiving that story into our own life is like making the pie and tasting it. And then sharing it with someone else.

The scriptural stories *about* Jesus do nourish and give meaning to our tradition. But the Risen and living Christ opens doors to *experiences* of meaning. Our scriptural stories offer frameworks and pathways that guide us into encounters of the holy and transcendent in the lives that you and I are leading right now.

Mark's version of the night when Christ passed from death to life is unique among the gospels. It begins with three women: Mary, Jesus' aunt and his mother's sister; Mary Magdalene, one of his closest friends; and Salome, the mother of James and John bar-Zebedee.

These three women go to anoint the body of Jesus, worrying about how to move the massive stone at the mouth of the tomb, only to discover that someone or something has already moved the stone. The three women enter the tomb expecting to find a body wrapped in linen. Instead, they encounter a young man in a white robe.

The women are understandably amazed.

The young man speaks to them: "Do not be amazed. You seek Jesus the Nazarene, who has been crucified. He has been raised; he is not here." He directs them to the place where the body was laid, and then tells them to go and tell Peter and the other disciples that Jesus has gone to Galilee and says, "There you will see him, as he told you."

Go back to the beginning, he tells them. Back to Galilee where they all came from. But life will never be as it was before. For anyone.

Matthew, Luke and John all tell resurrection stories that describe what happened when people met the Risen Christ. Only Mark's story ends without another sighting of Christ; without any *hint* that the three

women will recover enough to tell people what they saw; and, in fact, without stories of anyone ever encountering the Risen Christ.

Because all of the oldest manuscripts end right here, with this: “...they said nothing to anyone; for they were afraid.”

Later manuscripts added endings that must have felt more satisfying, but the additions are awkward and unlike the rest of Mark’s portrayal of Jesus. The additions offer an image of a majestic Jesus sitting at the right hand of God in heaven.

But the older manuscripts leave us hanging. If we will see it, however, we are also left with a tantalizing opening; an opening for three women who failed in their commission; an opening for the disciples who deserted Jesus; an opening for Peter, who denied Jesus.

An opening for every single person who has ever lived or who ever *will* live. Without exception. An opening for you and for me, like the open mouth of an empty tomb.

Mark brilliantly leaves the stone moved away from this opening for us to decide whether we will enter into the mystery or stay outside to tell more comforting stories. Mark has left an invitation for us to move into the story of the empty tomb and then back out to our actual lives – our day-to-day lives back in Galilee – to encounter our own actual, living experiences of the resurrection.

Mark’s Gospel ends with a collection of flawed people who really would like to be good followers of Christ; confused disciples like Peter, the three women. And you and me.

And Christ is present to us all.

This is more than just an amazing story. What God is doing in and through Jesus didn’t stop at the empty tomb. The resurrection is not a conclusion; it’s an invitation. Yes, our Savior has triumphed over death and sin and evil, but the Gospel doesn’t end there. Because, through the Paschal mystery, *we* have been buried *with* our brother in Baptism into his death *and raised with him* to newness of life.

The invitation in Mark's Gospel is this: having witnessed the empty tomb, we are summoned to Galilee – to return to our lives, to our families, to our work or wherever "Galilee" is for us. Because "there you will see him, as he told you." There, with God's help, we learn to live resurrection lives that evolve, enhance and engage God's on-going redemption of creation and all humankind.

Here at the end of Mark's Gospel, we may forget that it opened with a sentence as unique and grammatically awkward as the abrupt ending sentence that ends the Gospel.

Matthew opens with a family history for Jesus that might be expected, even if it is a little lengthy and a little untraditional. Luke opens with a lyrical and lovely story with angels and shepherds, a courageous young mother and her sweet baby boy. John's Gospel opens with an epic, poetic hymn, rich with theological insights.

Mark opens with this simple sentence: "The *beginning* of the good tidings of Jesus the Anointed." Now, some scholars – myself included – speculate that this was intended to be a title rather than an introduction. Some also think that what follows is based on Peter's preaching. Regardless, the story did get out somehow, didn't it?

But no matter who captured what in writing, there is a crucial two-part message for us: first, Jesus Christ has passed from death into life – into our lives – and, second, through the Paschal mystery, we have passed from bondage to death into newness of life in Christ.

Christ is risen. And so are we.

God is at work in us and through us and around us. Our redeemer and our brother has made an opening in the Kosmos for us. And offers there an encounter with the mystery is that ours to enter.

Opening our hearts and minds to the Risen Christ allows the inexhaustible energies of God to pour into the Kosmos and to manifest in renewed life. And right here, right now, *this* is where the rest of the good tidings of Jesus the Anointed takes on life and shape and detail.

What will the next chapter be in your Gospel story?

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