

Epiphany V Year B 2015

We are still in the first chapter of Mark... a few verses into it, and Jesus is into his ministry full swing.... We began with Jesus' baptism, and then his temptation in the desert... John the baptizer is arrested... then Jesus calls his disciples... and now just 29 verses in, Jesus has begun his ministry of healing.... So just to collect ourselves in our reading of Mark...

Remember... three themes... First, that Jesus is the archetype of the baptized... so the baptized represented in the person of Jesus is the protagonist, if you will, in this gospel.... Second... timing... There is a decided tension in all of the gospels and in Paul between God's coming restoration in an apocalyptic future; and the coming of God's reign in present time... Mark's bias is decidedly towards the latter... that God's coming reign is breaking into our world as we speak.... And then third, the theme of resurrection, despite this gospel offering no resurrection appearance, this gospel at its heart is about resurrection... These three themes are intimately connected of course.... And I'll get to that... but first I want to fast forward to the end of Mark's gospel:

16 When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. ²Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb ³and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"

⁴But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. ⁵As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.

⁶“Don’t be alarmed,” he said. “You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. ⁷But go; tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.’”

⁸Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

As terse as this brief narrative is... it is rich with meaning.... First, just to make note... It is three women who have the experience of the empty tomb... the men have deserted... so much for the Roman Catholics saying that only men were Jesus’ disciples and therefore women can’t be priests.... Just saying.

When the women enter the tomb they see a young man... not an angel... but a young man wearing a white robe... remembering our theme of Baptism we would know that he is an initiate... a newly baptized, who, in the early church tradition would be baptized naked and then clothed in white linen... He tells the disciples, the women, that Jesus has been raised... the same word that appears throughout this gospel.... Peter’s mother in law about whom we just read... raised up...and then a few verses later, the

paralytic, raised... the man with the withered hand told to stand up... the Pharisee's daughter told to rise... and other stories in this gospel as well.... The word for rise up is everywhere and is translated as the now ossified churchy word, resurrection... But this is not resurrection a once upon a time thing... this is resurrection that permeates our daily lives.... Not a supernatural magic act that happened only to Jesus some two thousand years ago... but an immediate reality that occurs, I daresay more often than we think, in the mundane precincts of our world... as mundane as a mud hut in Galilee, the backwoods of the empire.... The hinterlands, the margins.

The young initiate is in the empty tomb pointing to Galilee... to the field of mission... and he tells the women... don't look here for resurrection life... look there, the place where Jesus leads us... Look there among the sick and the lost of our world... look in the lost corners, the hinterlands... those are the ones to whom we go, bearing the light of resurrection to those unable to stand.... Prevented from standing.... This gospel ends where it begins, among the broken and the lost, bringing life and worth.

Now I have never been accused of being a literalist... I have great respect for the myths and legends of the Bible.... I have no problem with contradictions of theology in scripture... these are learned scribes merely trying to speculate imaginatively as to the meaning of creation in the

presence of God... speculation, an essential rudiment of faith... I love the metaphorical imagery of scripture and the myriad interpretations thereof. The resurrection stories of the gospels are powerful metaphors pointing to the profound truth of existence that life is forever being renewed... on a personal level... and on a corporate level... that death in its many guises is merely a step in the process to new life... this is a truth so awesome that we tell of it as a man from God rising from the grave... the resurrection motif indeed exists in many religions. O.K. That's well and good.

However, I'm pretty sure Mark is being literal here! Mark doesn't want to leave us with the high metaphor of the empty tomb only... I think we are meant to take his account of resurrection literally. But for Mark Resurrection is a vocation...a process... the process of creation. It is the work, the privilege, the responsibility of the baptized, our principal theme...It is the responsibility of the baptized to go into the world and heal...to go into the world and feed....To go into the world and cast out evil... to go into the world and break bread with outcasts.... To go into the world and stand against injustice... to go into the world with compassion and kindness.... Resurrection is about going into the world and offering our hand in intimate gesture... to offer our hand to lift up the broken... to bring dignity and worth to every single human being.... Healing is perhaps the

most powerful image of the power of the community to restore one who is isolated from it.... To heal is to have bodily knowledge of our worth... and healing is contagious... it is contingent.... Healing connects us to the whole.... Not only the whole of the human community, but the whole of things....

Mark's concept of resurrection is about wholeness and wellbeing and dignity.... It is the idea that knowing one's worth in the eyes of God is to be empowered to live life fully for ourselves and for others... that is our gift as people of faith to the world... the gift of resurrection... the gift of raising our brothers, our sisters who are brought low to the affirming and life-giving realm of worth... worth.

I have said before that the literary device of this gospel is that it is decidedly dark... the powers that be are capricious and envious and violent... the disciples are sworn to secrecy lest they get in trouble with the authorities... Indeed the community of Mark lives in a dangerous and violent world... much like ours... and yet this gospel proclaims life in the way of Christ that is healing and transformative and full and true.... Perhaps that contrast is no better presented than in the very last line of this gospel... "And they told no one for they were afraid." That's the last word.... No shining Jesus ascending aloof into the heavens.... but the word for afraid is

also the word for awe... So the last line of this gospel could be rightly translated as, "And they told no one for they were awestruck."

We live in a post modern culture that is entirely unimpressed... that's why we are the most joyless and addicted culture ever known in human civilization... to practice the art of resurrection is the pathway to joy and awe when all our illusions fail... We are meant to live lives that are awestruck... awestruck with the knowledge of what God can do through us... That requires of course everything of us... it requires paying attention to our world and acting for the greater good....Brothers and sisters, we are given the honorable privilege of reaching out our hands and raising people to dignity and wholeness. It is what we are made for; and the time is now, immediate... We are to raise people up to know their worth... There are so many people for us to love... How awesome is that,,, how literally awesome is that?