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Everything Good Comes From That

Mark 16:1-8 NRSV, emended

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

The beginning of the famous Charles Dickens' novel, *A Christmas Carol*, begins with one startling truth: Marley was dead. "There was no doubt Marley was dead," the narrator says, continuing, "This must be distinctly understood, or nothing wonderful can come of the story I am going to relate." So, too, we begin today. Sunday, after the crucifixion. After the long, quiet Saturday. Jesus Christ, the Savior of the World, with all his disciple's hopes and dreams—with all *our* hopes and dreams for a world restored—is dead. And everything good comes from that.

Enter into this story, the women: Mary and Mary and Salome. And what they see seizes them with both terror and amazement. So much terror and amazement, in fact, that they say nothing to nobody because they were afraid. And that is where Mark ends his story. It is like that scene in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, where they are looking at an inscription on a cave wall with the last words of Joseph of Arimathea, claiming, "... the Holy Grail may be found in the castle of Aaaauuggggghhhh." Hilarity ensues as King Arthur and his knights speculate what is meant by this - was the cavewriter interrupted? But why they write such a long, groaning word? It is, of course, funnier when they do it. Back to our story. What happened to Mark? Did he get interrupted? Where are all the fabulous resurrection accounts? How can this possibly be the end of a tale that is supposed to be "good news"?

Some years ago, Valparaiso Professor Emeritus Fred Neidner suggested this was exactly the ending Mark had planned. Because when you found yourself at the very last page with an ending like that, what would you do? If the last word was the death of Jesus and the women's fear, wouldn't you wonder what the fuss had been about? Wouldn't you try

to puzzle it back together? If you'd heard the story proclaimed in your congregation, wouldn't you talk about it with others? Wouldn't you return to the story to see if you missed something? And if you did, where would flipping back to the start get you? It would get you to: "The beginning of the Good News of Jesus Christ, the son of God." The one John the Baptist told about, the one at whose baptism a voice from heaven says, "This is the Son of God" - the first word spoken to Jesus in the gospel, and the last word said about him on the cross. And then Jesus would speak: "The time has come near; repent and believe in the good news." And where is Jesus preaching? In Galilee, exactly where the young man in the empty tomb said he would be. This weird cliff-hanger of an ending would show us that Jesus lived a resurrected life - the very life Jesus invites us into. Jesus is dead, but when we return to the story, we find him resurrected, we find him exactly where he promised he would be, and everything good comes from that.

Death is all around us: it is in COVID and mass shootings and hate crimes. It is cancer and divorces and drug addiction and heart disease and accidents. It is in a thousand paper cuts of hurtful words and unkept promises and broken hearts. We, too, are dead. And everything good comes from that.

So, beloved, repent and believe in this Good News. The Good News that it is exactly where you are broken, exactly where it hurts, exactly where we've wounded each other, exactly where and when we are dead that the Good News begins.

Alleluia. Amen.