

Friends in Christ,

This morning's reading is the story of the first Easter's "Spice Girls." This group of women has been admired and studied for 2000 years. But not for their pop songs or looks. For their faith and simple humanity, including their initial fear on resurrection morning.

Mark's version of the Easter story is quite different from what Hilary and the youth shared at the beginning of our worship service. There are four gospel accounts of the resurrection of Jesus. And Mark's is the shortest but also shocking. Shocking in that the women at the tomb were silent in reaction to the news of Jesus' resurrection. Did you catch that? Listen again.

Mk 16:8 Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

We know from the other gospels that the women did go on to tell others what they had seen. But that's not Mark's concern in our Bible reading today. He concludes his report here on the resurrection saying that the women said nothing to anyone because they were afraid.

But let's back up a bit.

The Resurrection

First, Mark tells the story of the resurrection. The women were on their way to the tomb where Jesus had been buried. His body had been put in the tomb as quickly as possible on Friday evening because the Sabbath and the Passover were about to begin. There was no time to properly prepare his dead body for the grave. Moreover, it was against religious laws to do that on the Sabbath so they waited until the morning after the Sabbath, which would have been Sunday. They came expecting to find the dead body of the one they loved and to anoint it with burial spices. That was the usual practice.

But on the way to the tomb, these spice girls anticipated a problem. I expect you've all seen a picture of the big stone usually rolled in front of a tomb in that day. This giant obstacle, the big round stone would need to be rolled away from the opening so they could get in. To move it away you would not only have the weight of the stone which is estimated to be at least one standard ton or 2000 pounds. Plus, you'd also have to push it upwards in the slightly tilted track it was set in. This was no job for 3 or 4 women; it would have been difficult even for a handful of very strong men. Some people suggest it could take about 20 men. No wonder v.3 tells us:

Mk 16:3 and they (the women) asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"

That quickly became no concern at all. Something amazing had happened. They found the stone rolled back, so they went inside. And there an angel spoke to them. Again, Mark tells us,

Mk 16:5 As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe (angels often appeared as people dressed in white and this is confirmed in the other gospels) sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed. Mk 16:6 "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.

What? Can it be? How can it be? These women are frightened by what they see. Or are they dumbstruck by what they hear?

The Reaction of the Women

What are we to make of the reaction of the women?

Well, let's back up again. Look at various reactions to Jesus that people have had. Mark records a few:

In chapter 5, there is a man from whom Jesus cast out a demon. He called Jesus, **"The Son of the Most High God"**

In chapter 8 Peter says to Him, **"You are the Christ."**

Blind Bartimaeus in chapter 10 said to Jesus, **"You are the Son of David."**

Then in chapter 15, the Roman Centurion who watched Jesus die on Good Friday declared, **"Surely this man was the Son of God!"**

The genius of Mark's gospel—really what he's doing—is working to get us as readers to respond to Jesus. And that's why he leaves us with this shocking response of the women to Jesus' resurrection. Others have had something to say when they are face to face with Jesus and realize who he is! But now suddenly all we read after Jesus rises from the dead is

Mk 16:8 Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

It seems Mark wants us to react to their silence. How can this be? Would I be silent like those women? What would you do or say if you are confronted by this announcement of Jesus' resurrection from the dead?

I'll cut the spice girls some slack. I'm sure you will as well because these women had just had the shock of their life. They loved Jesus. They followed him. And they knew he had died on Good Friday. V.40 or chapter 15 records the names of several women, including the ones listed at the beginning of chapter 16. These women stayed near the foot of the cross until the very end. Nonetheless, if they had listened closely and believed Jesus' message more fully, they should not have been surprised that he rose from the dead. But it is undoubtedly shocking to come to the tomb, find the stone rolled away and an angel telling you,

Mk 16:6 "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.

That never happens ordinarily. We can't fault these ladies for their stunned silence. Can you imagine going to the grave of your loved one and hearing that message? He's not here. He's alive. He's has risen from the dead. That would sound unbelievable to us. So I think we can understand the initial shock of these women. I suspect even fear is a pretty understandable reaction to seeing an angel sitting in the tomb where you expect to find a dead body. These women are very ordinary humans like us.

But the reaction Mark leaves us with is their silence. They said nothing to anyone. They were quiet. If you take to heart the words of the Bible editors we find in our Bibles after v.8, they basically say that's where the book should end. That's where it originally ended. That's the thought Mark wanted his readers to sit with.

It's Mark's way of saying to us, "What's your response?"

My friends, the women at the tomb did not remain silent about the empty tomb. If they had and if others had, Mark would never have had a story to tell. The fact that he does tell the story of the resurrection of Jesus indicates that these women found their voices. The other three gospels fill us in on what those women and others said and did in response to the resurrection of Jesus. They were definitely changed by his resurrection power at work in them.

All throughout his gospel, Mark wants us to commit to following Jesus. He shows us time and again what other people say about Jesus. He even tells us in chapter 15:41 "these women had followed Jesus and cared for his needs." And now at the end, after Jesus has risen from the dead and the tomb is empty, he wants us to think about who we think Jesus is. The spice women are silent for a time. But what about you?

Who Do YOU say Jesus is?

Having heard the gospel that Jesus is alive, what do you and I do with that news? Who do YOU say Jesus is? Mark's ending of the resurrection story with the women's silence forces us as readers to say, "Wait! The gospel can't end in silence! The so-called 'Greatest Story Ever Told' can't become the greatest story that is *never* told!" No, the gospel cannot end in silence.

And it didn't. The Christian message is one of hope. You don't have to worry about your failures and your weaknesses. Whether you've testified to Jesus enough or not? Jesus has paid for all our sins of commission and omission.

Is 53:6b the LORD has laid on Jesus the iniquity of us all.

Friends, Jesus who rose from the dead comes into our lives as we put our faith in him. His resurrection power is now at work in all who believe in him. His works allows us to live in the comfort of his forgiving grace. His victory over fear and separation helps us to love one another better. He helps reconcile broken relationships—resurrect them, you might say—even as he reconciles us to God. He helps us see beyond our current hardships as he works all things together for our good. Jesus makes us new creatures

who begin to experience the power of our resurrected Lord now already as we overcome sin, overcome fear and overcome much of the brokenness we experience in this world. My friends, remember this: If death could not hold Jesus down, then none of our problems in this life are too big for him to handle either!

How do you respond? After their initial silence and fear, the original Spice Girls were part of the faith-filled church that saw Jesus alive and never turned back. They found their voice and declared, "Christ is Risen!" Nothing could silence them after a while! Nothing. They had seen the angel and heard his message. Later they saw the risen Lord with their own eyes and there was no going back to living in fear. Now knowing that Jesus overcame death, they knew nothing is impossible for him.

Will you trust him with your life? You won't be sorry if you do. My friends, the resurrection can't end in silence. Let your lips shout out, "Hallelujah, Christ is Risen. He is risen indeed!"

We can't be indifferent and we don't have to be afraid. Jesus, who strengthened the women at the tomb, his disciples and the five hundred other witnesses to his resurrection, and Jesus who has strengthened and saved his people throughout history, will strengthen and empower us in this world. He's with us through thick and thin. He helps us live in the comfort of knowing that we belong to him now and for eternity. Yes, we can live out of the power and presence of our resurrected Lord! What a difference that makes in life! It's worth shouting out!

Amen.