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Mark 16:1-8:

Preached at Trinity CRC

April 1, 2018 – Easter Sunday

Good morning and Happy Easter.

This morning we'll be asking the question, "What does the resurrection mean?"

What does it mean for Jesus' disciples who failed to understand...

Who failed to believe...

Who basically experienced a lot of short-coming in the time of Jesus' ministry...

What does the resurrection mean for them?

And, what does the resurrection mean for us?

Easter is the high point of our church calendar...

The day that changed everything.

We gather *every* Sunday in celebration of Christ's resurrection...

Every Lord's Day is a recognition of Jesus Christ being raised from the dead.

So what does it mean to us?

This morning we're continuing to look at Mark's Gospel...

Now looking at the end of his story.

Mark 16:1-8

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. ² Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb ³ and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"

⁴ But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. ⁵ As 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. ⁷ But 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.

The Word of the Lord. (**Thanks be to God**)

We live in a culture that appreciates a good story.

And perhaps some of the best stories are those that end well.

The protagonist, or the main character, may face their struggles in the beginning—

The odds may be stacked against them—

But that just makes the story more enjoyable when they come out on top in the end.

Like in the movie “The Pursuit of Happiness...”

Where Will Smith plays a father who puts all of his saving into purchasing a stockpile of bone density scanners.

He puts all of his money into these machines hoping to sell them off to doctor’s offices...

Unaware that he’s about to come into competition with X-ray machines.

The whole movie is the story of this man and his struggles...

His wife leaves him...

He loses his apartment and has to sleep in homeless shelters with his son...

He applies for an internship at an investment firm only to find out it doesn’t pay...

And at this investment firm he seems to be the guy that everyone goes to for the odd jobs...the demeaning jobs:

“Park my car...get me some coffee...let me borrow some money...”

You find yourself pulling for this guy...

You want him to succeed...

You want to see him come out on top.

Because that’s the way things should go in our stories:

If you struggle long enough...

And work at it hard enough...

Success will come your way.

We love to hear stories like that of Walt Disney...

Who was fired from a newspaper early in his career because “he lacked creativity and had no good ideas.”

Or Michael Jordan...

Who was denied a spot on the varsity basketball team because he was too short...

Or J.K. Rowling...

Who went through years of what she describes as failure where she was on welfare, lost her job, and was a single parent.

She is now of course the well-known author of the Harry Potter books.

We love these kind of stories...

Struggles and failure that lead to success.

That’s what makes our passage today so hard to swallow.

I don’t know if it struck you as odd...

But Mark’s Gospel ends quite abruptly and without the story of success we’re expecting for the disciples.

Let me read the last three verses again:

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.

Right after this verse, in most Bibles, you will read the bracketed words:

“The earliest manuscripts and some other ancient witnesses do not have Mark 16:9-20.”

In the earliest copies we have of Mark’s Gospel it ends with verse 8.

Bible scholars and historians think that everything after verse 8 was added later...

Now from the other Gospel accounts we know that Jesus does indeed meet with his disciples and some amazing things *do* happen...

But Mark chose not to report those things...

It was not his intention to tell of the post-resurrection encounters.

Mark's Gospel originally ends with this sentence:

“They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.”

Not the ending that we were hoping for.

For the last month and a half we've been talking about the disciples of Jesus in Mark's Gospel...

We've been talking in large part about their failings...

About how they struggle to grasp who Jesus is and why he's come.

Jesus calls Peter Satan after Peter tries rebuking him;

With a certain sense of pride, the disciples argue about who is the greatest;

They lack faith even after seeing Jesus perform miracles;

The disciples fail when trying to cast out a demon because they start to rely on their own power;

And most recently they fail to stay awake in the garden of Gethsemane...

Then the disciples abandon him...they flee when Jesus is arrested (14:50).

And Peter professes not know Jesus 3 times.

The disciples are not painted in the best light in Mark's Gospel.

They have had their fair share of failure and doubt...

They go through their early struggles.

So we expect that at the end of the story the disciples will make a comeback.

Like so many other stories out there...

We're hoping that they will rise from the depths of failure to achieve great success...

[Walt Disney, Michael Jordan, J.K. Rowling]...

We're anticipating that the disciples will see, believe, rejoice, and spread the good news.

But what do we find?

“Trembling and bewildered they went out and *fled* from the tomb...”

They couldn't get out of there fast enough.

“They said *nothing* to anyone, because they were afraid.”

The End.

What kind of ending to the Gospel is that?

That probably wouldn't sell a lot of movie tickets today with that ending.

We are left with an ending that, yet again, is a failure on the part of Jesus' followers.

They do exactly the opposite of what they're commanded.

They don't say a word.

And the story ends.

We are confronted with the failings of Jesus' followers...

And I think it's pretty easy for us to identify with them.

Time after time we anticipate reaching this place of success as Christ's disciples.

But, honestly, we come up short far more often than we succeed.

Our lives are filled with doubts, fears, insecurities, betrayal, silence and disobedience.

We're no different than the disciples throughout Mark's Gospel.

We love stories of hardship that lead to success because all too often this is not our life...

We're more acquainted with failure than with success...

Most of us can make a list of our shortcomings pretty easily...

Those sins to which we succumb all too quickly.

Like the disciples, we come up short...

Our story is doomed to end badly.

But thanks be to God the end of the story is not determined by what *we* do...

The end of the story is not determined by *our failures*...

It's not determined by our short-comings.

The end of the story is determined by what *God* has done through Christ.

We are told in the catechism, (Q&A 45):

“By his resurrection he has overcome death...

By his power we too are *already raised* to new life...”

In the resurrection of Christ, God brings new life to those who fail.

There is new life for the disciples...

The young man sitting in the tomb tells the women:

“Go, tell his disciples and Peter...”

“Go, tell his followers...”

“The ones who abandoned him...the ones who turned their back on him.”

“Go, tell Peter...”

“The one who denied the Lord 3 times...”

“The one who is right now full of disgrace and shame...”

“The one who probably doesn’t even consider himself a disciple anymore.”

“Go, tell them that the Lord has risen!”

...that he has overcome death!

With these words the message implies that there is new life...

Not just for Christ, but for his followers.

There is an assurance of restoration for those who failed terribly.

So what did the resurrection mean for Jesus’ disciples?

It meant that there was new life *now*.

It meant that sins were forgiven.

It meant that their failure was nailed to the cross and died.

It meant that Christ paid for the shame and disgrace of betrayal.

With the resurrection, everything changed.

And now Christ was going ahead of them to Galilee...

Back to where it all started...

Back to where the disciples were first called...(Mark 1:14)

Where “Jesus went into Galilee proclaiming the good news of God...”

Where he first tells Simon, Andrew and the other disciples, “Come, follow me.”

Back to Galilee where the first miracles and healings were performed...

Where the disciples misunderstood who Jesus was and what he was doing.

The disciples are invited to go back and see things with new eyes...

They're "invited to rethink it all, to reappraise the whole story in light of its ending..."
(Lance Pape, *Working Preacher*)

In light of the resurrection.

And this is our invitation too.

"By his power, we are already raised to new life."

We are not *being resurrected*...

We have *been* resurrected by Christ's power...

When Christ was raised from the grave...

We too were raised to new life.

For us today, the resurrection of Christ means new life.

It means new life for us who have failed...

It means new life for us who have turned our back and betrayed the Lord...

There *is* success at the end of this story...

It is a good story after all...

But it's not success because of something that we do...

We are doomed to a bad ending on our own.

It's God's success...

It's success because of what God has done in the resurrection of Christ.

So now we're invited to go back...

To go back to our Galilee and see things through this new lens...

To see things after we know the end of the story.

All of the sin...

All of the guilt...

All of the betrayal...

We are invited to see it all anew after the resurrection...

After the success of Jesus, being raised from the dead.

In Christ we have already been raised to new life.

The resurrection has changed everything...

And it means that we live out of this new life.

It means that we participate in life as those who have been resurrected with Christ.

Bringing this Good News to those who have not yet heard...

Bringing hope to the hopeless and lonely...

Announcing forgiveness of sins...

Proclaiming that Christ has swallowed up death, shame, and disgrace.

The resurrection means that we live with hope in our work...

It means that we live with hope for failing relationships...

It means that we can have grace for where others have failed us.

Because of Christ's resurrection...

We have success...

We have new life.

And now we live by the power of the Holy Spirit to bring God's love into this hurting world.