

Well, Here's How I Heard It

[Text - Mark 16:1-8]

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When it comes to abruptly ending a spellbinding story, the author of the Gospel of Mark takes the cake: "So the women went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid!" And that's all she wrote [or all he wrote]! It's only in the later, expanded versions of *Mark* that stories of the Risen Christ appearing to Mary Magdalene and the other disciples are found - stories that were probably adapted from the other Gospel accounts. Each Gospel contains different descriptions of what took place on that first Easter morning, which may raise some questions for us on this Easter morning. Did a *group* of women go to the tomb, or did Mary Magdalene go alone? Were there two men in white there to greet them, or one, or none? Did the male disciples completely dismiss the report of the Resurrection as "foolish nonsense", or did Peter and John race to the tomb to see for themselves?

There are some people who point to these discrepancies within the Gospel accounts, as grounds for dismissing them as "foolish nonsense". Personally, I think that if these stories were exactly the same, they would seem a lot less credible. The fact that each narrative varies in its telling, tells us that the Gospel writers aren't interested in creating a cohesive, airtight account. Instead, they are more concerned with telling the story that rings true to their own life and faith experience. And while Mark's abrupt ending does entice others to later add to it, in an attempt to "complete" the story, I find that open-ended ending extremely intriguing. It's as if the writer is saying "Don't depend on *me* to tell *you* how the story ends, because it's really up to you! You are the one who will determine how the Risen Christ impacts your life, and your world, today!"

In attempting to express the *inexpressible* mystery and power of the Resurrection, the Gospels writer makes use of the various traditions

that have been handed-down to them. They each feel free to craft the story in their own way, in order to convey how this marvelous phenomena has touched, inspired, and changed their own lives. So perhaps these are the questions we should ask ourselves on this Easter morning: “How do you and I experience, express, and live-out the story of Christ’s Resurrection?” Or, “How does the Living Christ touch and transform your life, my life, *our* lives, as Twenty-first Century followers?”

In the First Century, Jesus of Nazareth approaches Life with a tremendous desire, and ability, to bring-about positive changes. He brings healing to the sick, hope to the oppressed, welcome the out-cast, Light and Life to those dark and deadly recesses of the human heart and psyche. Jesus courageously defends the weak and the lowly, against those who seek to control, condemn and exploit them; yet when he himself is threatened, he doesn’t return evil for evil. Instead, he offers grace and forgiveness - even to those who nail him to the cross. Jesus willingly gives his life, to take a stand for what is good and gracious and just - trusting that his Divine, Creative Source is good and gracious and just; genuinely loving, and absolutely dependable!

At first, Jesus’ followers think that he’s made a terrible mistake - that the powers of hatred, fear, and death have won the day. But with the dawning of that first Easter morning, they each discover for themselves that the Divine Source of Life - who Jesus trusted completely - does have the final say. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ conveys a tremendous Truth: that our Eternal, Creative Source is fully present in the midst of Life’s most horrible and destructive situations. And when seen from this perspective, the Easter Story becomes much more than an old legend, found in an ancient book. It is the Divine *Promise* which is woven within *every* human story where good triumphs over evil, where love overcomes fear and hatred, where life and hope rise-up ever stronger from the most dire and devastating circumstances imaginable.

The Easter Story, in all of its renderings, invites and inspires us to trust that there is nothing that can ever dissolve that eternal, organic bond that we have with our Divine Originating Source. And from this elemental starting point, the Easter story can be recounted in *countless* ways; because the Resurrection isn't merely one moment in Time! It is an on-going, life-changing reality that can be experienced by different people in many different ways.

Easter's Good News is that the Life of Jesus Christ doesn't end at the Cross, or in the tomb; actually, that is where it begins anew. It is born anew in the lives of those dazed women who first discover that the tomb is empty. It is born again in the hearts of those frightened and dejected disciples who, at first, can't believe it; but later, can't help *but* believe. And that Christ-like, Resurrection-Life continues to be re-born in every subsequent generation, including our own. On that first Easter morning, that empty tomb is only the beginning. Out of that dark void there arises a new Light and Life, that somehow changes timid and terrified individuals, into bold and dependable witnesses, who totally transform the world! And on *this* Easter morning, you and I are invited and empowered to embrace that same Light and Life for ourselves, and to freely share it with those around us.

All around us, every day, there are people who are *hungering* for hope and purpose, for wholeness and peace. And as the Living Body of Christ, you and I have the awesome privilege to show them the Way: To graciously and warmly welcome them, without prejudice or judgement;
To encourage them and stand with them in their struggles and sorrows, and in their joys and triumphs;
And above all, to assure them that they, too, are completely loved by our One Divine Source.

This *is* the Easter Story! How this remarkable story continues to unfold in our lives today, remains to be told.
So, I trust you will all come back next Sunday, as we continue to compose and live-out our part of the story. And I hope you will invite

others, so that they, too, can take their part in this amazing, on-going narrative of Easter's Good News!