



## SUNDAY SERMON

# In my end is my beginning

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Now what? Now what happens? The scripture we just heard – that was it; the end of the book. The Gospel of Mark ends with, “They fled from the tomb, terror and amazement had seized them; they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.” Afraid – the last word. This, from the author who began this book with deliberate clarity – “The beginning of the Good News of Jesus Christ” – ends it with “they were afraid.”

“Happy Easter!” I guess. You know that feeling when a movie ends, a good novel ends, abruptly. Wait! What?! It’s over?! Did they get together? Was there resolution? Or the silence after a crash: I was in a car accident once – sudden spinning, everything screeching, thrusting steel, a deafening thud – then... nothing. Until I notice: I’m still here. Is there silence after the last round is fired in a school shooting? Students clutched crouched, hearts pounding silently in young bodies. Ears, senses, alert, waiting.

Now what happens? Life, death, then...? Christian salvation is a curious thing. For, it is complete; it is accomplished. We’re celebrating the victory of Easter. In the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead we rejoice that God’s love has triumphed once for all and that God triumphs now. We are free! Life triumphs over death, grace and forgiveness triumph over sin, pride, division; and love triumphs over fear. Love wins.

And yet.... Here we are, our own lives and the world about us not feeling particularly “saved” or abundant in love. Yes, there are days full with light, grace and joy, but also fear, confusion, and hurt. Salvation is a curious thing: for it is accomplished, and yet we have a part to play.

Something happens in that moment of “now what?!” An aperture opens, a threshold is crossed. A new way opens. Somehow, by the grace of God, new life rises up from that which had died. Love, we discover, is stronger than death. The resurrection of Christ is not only something we receive; life in Christ is something we practice. Faith is not only something we believe; faith is something we practice. We proclaim the resurrection not only with our lips, but with our lives through love.

“In my end is my beginning,” wrote T.S. Eliot (East Coker). How? How do we “practice resurrection”? In much the same way we practice the violin, practice medicine, or practice generosity. By doing it.

Today’s Gospel text is both epilogue and prologue, the end and the beginning. So let’s learn from the women. You did notice the lead characters in today’s story – three women. Mary the Magdalene, one of Jesus’ closest companions; Mary the mother of James, thus the mother of Jesus’ too; and Salome, mother of Jesus’ twin friends, James and John. Long after the male disciples had fled the Garden of Gethsemane and Peter had denied even knowing Jesus, it was the

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### DATE

Easter  
Sunday, Apr. 1, 2018

### PREACHER

The Rev. Ledlie Laughlin

### VERSE

Mark 16:1-8

women – these three – from love, who stayed, watched, wept as Jesus was nailed to the cross, hung and died; who went as they laid his body in the tomb; who now come with spiced oils to anoint his body; the first to witness the resurrection.

This is not incidental. At every step, the Jesus we meet in Mark's Gospel challenges the societal, religious, and political constructs. By his very presence, he unmasks, undoes false hierarchies. To him there are no "others;" no tribes; no one beneath or outside. "The witness of these women is the last, most radical example of Mark's narrative subversion of the canons of social orthodoxy." (Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*) They are free to act in new ways.

The last we heard, the women ran in fear. Where'd they go? What did they do? We're not told. We know that in short order, word was out on the street: Christ is risen. Christ is risen from the dead. Somehow, somewhere on their path, the women's fear turned to proclamation. Love rose up stronger even than death. A new way opened. In their end was their beginning.

What happened that evening in February, Valentine's Day, Ash Wednesday, when the students of Marjorie Stoneman Douglas High School went home – trembling in shock? Somehow, somewhere their fear turned to proclamation. Love rose up stronger than death.

At age fourteen, Alyssa Alhadeff was the youngest person shot and killed in her classroom that day. It is too soon for those who love Alyssa to consider new beginnings, yet in a letter to the Post (3.23) her mother wrote, "I know what my job is now. My job is to be Alyssa's voice, because hers has been silenced.... I stand with the students... as they fight for change."

As children of God and lovers of all that is sacred, our job – our gift, really – is to be Christ's voice because his voice can never be silenced. It is for us to be Christ's heart, Christ's hands, Christ's love in this world. To practice resurrection.

I wonder what this new way might be for you.

Perhaps you've lost someone to death in recent months, in recent years. A friendship or love abruptly ended. Is it too soon to ask about new beginnings – the path you are finding, making, even without that person in flesh and blood beside you? We live in the midst of death; a job lost, a relationship betrayed, a dream too long deferred. Political machinations drain the life out of us, pursuit of economic security never satisfies.

For you, how will love rise stronger than death?

There's a pattern. When God takes our end and gives us a new beginning, we discover three things:

1. We realize that life is not about us; we are not the center; we are but a part of something much greater than ourselves.
2. The words spoken by the angel to the women at the tomb are spoken also to us: that the risen Christ is gone before you... God is going ahead of us.
3. Fear need not constrain us. Fear turns to proclamation. Love frees us.

To say a bit more about each of these:

As we try to put belief into practice – practice our life in Christ, practice resurrection – we find, first, we are not living for ourselves alone. Dear ones, you are part of something much greater than yourself. You don't have to prove yourself able or worthy. Haven't your hearts already been broken? Let your love be for those who are hurting; give your voice for those who have no voice. If you've already been stripped down, been to the tombs, they can't take anything from you.

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Two. As promised, God has gone before us. Wherever you're headed, God is already there. God will be there when we get to Galilee or home, or wherever. When I feel snared by anxiety, it's because I'm presuming it's up to me – to do something or be someone or engage in a particular way. When I enter a room and am able to trust that God has entered ahead of me – that God is already in you, in them, in those with whom I'll engage – it's different. I am free to enter with an open heart; to pay attention, appreciate, receive, and be grateful. Dear ones, practice this. When you feel anxiety rising, remember God is here, there; envision Christ present in those around you. Act accordingly.

Last, when fear does not constrain us, we are free to love. We all know this. We may be afraid – and we don't let our fear stop us. Were those women afraid? You bet. Did it stop them? Not a bit. We proclaim the resurrection not only with our lips, but with our lives – through love. The world needs the love you have to share, a love not subservient to authorities or rules. In these anxious days, the world waits for the Easter love you have received, the Easter love you have to give.

Now what? God's love is stronger than death. Practice resurrection. Be the voice of those with no voice. Be arms of love in this world. Christ is risen, indeed. Alleluia! Alleluia!