

Psalm 118: 19-24
Mark 16: 1-8

“Going Home”
Easter, Communion

April 5, 2015
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As far as biblical scholars have been able to discover, the passage we just shared from the Gospel of Mark was its original ending. Yet, if you will check your Bibles you will find two additional endings, the shorter one added sometime after the fourth century, and the longer one sometime during the second century.

Like optional endings to a story or movie, the original ending was found to be wanting - too abrupt for some tastes; so unknown editors attempted to make a couple of additions based upon the other gospel accounts. After all, what kind of “gospel” – the word meaning, “Good News” ends with the last word being “afraid?”

Still, Mark the gospel writer, does provide us with some sense of hope and optimism in this last chapter. He writes that the messenger at the empty tomb tells the women, “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” (Mark 16:7). What? He is in Galilee? Why would that be the first place that Jesus went after his resurrection?

“When I get through with this chemo and get my strength back, the first thing I am going to do is to fly out to Pebble Beach and play that course.” “I have always dreamed of playing there and now when I get over this treatment, that’s what I want to do more than anything else in the world,” he commented.

“When I get out of graduate school the first thing I am going to do is go to New York City to celebrate.” “I’ve never been there and I’m going to see all the sights.” “I’m going to go to a Broadway play, visit the U.N. and the Statue of Liberty, ride a subway, eat some food I’ve never eaten before and, see some things I’ve only seen on TV,” she said.

So why, on the first day of his ETERNAL LIFE, did Jesus first go to Galilee –his home territory? One might have thought that upon being raised from the dead, Jesus would stride triumphantly back to Jerusalem. Just imagine what a commotion THAT would have caused: “Pilate, you made a big mistake. I’m back!” the risen Christ might have said as he strode right into the palace and confronted all the important political people. Or he might have stood on the temple steps, addressed the Pharisees and Sadducees, scolding them for not accepting him as the Messiah. Or, he could have chastised the crowd for changing so quickly from their welcoming “Hosannas” to their condemning shouts of “Crucify him!” Then again, he could have marched right up the steps to the Upper Room where his

disciples now hide in fear, and demanded of them, “Where you there ... were you there when they crucified me . . . and laid me in the tomb?”

Jesus did none of that. Rather he went on ahead of his own disciples, promising to meet them back in Galilee where the story and their ministry began.

But what was so great about Galilee? What sort of important business was going on in Galilee? In a word - nothing! Nothing – that is, until Jesus got there. That was the way it was way out in Galilee, that region about 50 miles north of Jerusalem. It was a dusty, out-of-the-way sort of place.

But then Jesus came to Galilee, calling disciples. And a few men began to leave their homes, walking off good-paying jobs, and tried to act like disciples. Yes, Jesus shook things up out there in Galilee.

Jesus did not work in the city. There are no records that he ever went to Jerusalem after that one visit he and his family made when he was about 12. He doesn't seem to have returned there until that last fateful week of his life. And Jerusalem is where he met his end. So according to most calculations, about four-fifths of his ministry occurred out in Galilee. In Jerusalem his ministry ended. So his ministry began, and now begins AGAIN, in Galilee.

“He is not here....,” that’s what the messenger said to the fear-filled women. He is not here . . . here at the cemetery. Even though they and we have come to this beautiful, sacred, place of quiet rest, he is not here. He is not at the temple either. He is not in that place of sanctity, nor even in THIS religious place – as beautiful as it is. He is not at Fischer Park down by the ocean; he is not there at the crack of dawn with the rising sun slowly, yet majestically before our eyes. He is not at these places NOW because he is going on before us to Galilee – and there ‘we will see him,’ as he told us.

That means, of course, that Jesus will meet his disciples in a rather ordinary place – at a place where their discipleship began. In the case of our text, Jesus went back to where they had all once lived – out to Galilee. Remember, the Twelve had all met Jesus in Galilee. He had called them to follow him out there. They had attempted to follow him and become disciples mostly in and around Galilee.

So on the first Easter, when they were told that he going back to Galilee and he would meet them there, was that good news? In Jerusalem, they had betrayed and deserted him. Now, back in Galilee they are to meet him again. . . . What will he say to them about their betrayal? What will he do to them for turning and running? What will he say to them about not even being there at the foot of cross to offer words of comfort, or at least to be present at the time of his

suffering? They won't know answers to those questions until they go back home, back to Galilee, until the risen Christ, who had already gone on ahead of them, meets them.

So Jesus is loose. He is not only loose, but he is loose in Galilee. Now there is no getting away from him – no keeping him safely tucked away at the cemetery. There is no forgetting him and moving on with one's life, or returning to one's life as it was prior to meeting him. There is no disposing of him in some far away, exotic location of our consciousness. He has been raised and comes to Galilee; Yikes! he has come to where we live!

The resurrection is not just something that happened once out at the cemetery. That would be easy. The resurrection is something that happens on ahead of us – something that meets us in the world, our world; the resurrection meets us where we are – in our Galilee's – at home.

In Mark's hands, resurrection is not primarily a belief about life after death, but rather a vindication of Jesus' life in the world. It is a call to discipleship; a call to discipleship where we live – at home – here and now.

The messenger at the tomb tells the women to go and tell Jesus where they can all find him, and apparently they are to follow Jesus out to Galilee too. 'Don't stay here in the garden; don't go to the temple – Go back to your home; that's where he will meet you.' The messenger also tells the women to "go, tell" what they have seen and heard. So they are not only sent on a mission, by they are to tell others about the mission they are on.

But Mark says the women are frightened and don't tell anyone. Even after an encounter with the good news of resurrection, these are still Jesus' disciples – his faithless and disobedient disciples. The women do not do what the messenger tells them to do. (Of course, they must have eventually gotten the gumption to tell someone otherwise, we would not know this good news of the resurrection.)

Poet, novelist, and essayist, Reynolds Price sat one evening in a reading room of a university library and read the entire Gospel of Mark to a small audience of students and faculty. It was a spellbinding reading, and when he got to this final chapter at the end of Mark, those gathered just sat there stunned in silence for several minutes.

On the way out after the reading, a student turned to a religion professor and said, "Did they ever get the point?" "Who?" asked the professor. "His disciples," answered the student. "Did they ever get the point?" "No," responded the professor, "they never got the point." "It's the Gospel of Mark, and in this gospel,

the disciples never get the point.” “They were as dumb at Easter as they were at Christmas. Welcome to discipleship according to the Gospel of Mark.”

Maybe you are a bit like me, for when I read the gospel of Mark, I find myself thinking, “Okay, I may not be the best disciple in the world, but at least I could have figured things out better than Simon Peter.” The disciples never got the point. Of course, they were ordinary people – ordinary fishermen and the like. Maybe I should not expect so much of ordinary people who were living way out there by the shore of Lake Galilee. And in one final, uncomprehending, disbelieving act, despite what the messenger told the women they are disobedient because they are afraid. They tell no one – ah, true to themselves to the very end. And yet, the risen Christ goes back to them, back to where it all began, back to Galilee.

Surprise! The failure of the disciples, the denial of Peter, the betrayal of Judas – none of this is the end of the story. A fresh start can be made and where will that new beginning be? Not out at the cemetery, at the empty tomb. Not at the temple or at Pilate’s palace; not at some grand cathedral. No, Jesus is out where were live – at home in Galilee.

The Risen Christ appears to his disciples in the most ordinary of places: at breakfast by the lake, in the evening when they are hunkered down behind locked doors, on the road to Emmaus; out on the beach when they are hard at work with fishing nets. Something about the risen Christ motivates him to meet people in the most ordinary of places. And that’s good news for us if we want to meet Jesus, because most of us live in ordinary places like Galilee.

Galilee is not a center of power. It is not the hub of religious and civil activity; it is simply a place where people live and struggle to survive. In Mark’s Gospel it is the place where the way of love and justice begins to be practiced. And it is to Galilee that the resurrection points.

Mark does not offer any certainty that the disciples ever got the message even after the crucifixion. But we are told, like them, that the answer lies in Galilee – it is there that Jesus will meet us – at home - in the ordinary places. And the one thing we do know is that the way to Galilee is a corporate pilgrimage; it involves the disciples going out to him in the plural.

Mark the gospel writer is so honest. He shares with us poor, failing, disbelieving, fearful and stumbling disciples. Yet in a way, they give each of us contemporary disciples something to do after Easter. The women didn’t tell anybody; so that means the ball is in our court. If the women won’t tell anybody

what they have seen and heard, will we? Are we too afraid to share our faith, or will we go and tell?

“Go, tell his disciples and Peter he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you” (16:7). The women ran away from Easter – they were afraid and silent.

At least we have come toward Easter. We have not come running exactly, but walking at least. We have come rather noisily, expectantly, and even joyfully.

But now it's almost time to go: So now, go home! ... Go home to your Galilee, and tell somebody..... “Christ is Risen!”

Amen.