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Easter 2006:

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Mark 16:1-8

The older I get the more I like routine. I like days that go according to schedule: get up at the same time, eat my oatmeal, floss my teeth, say my prayers, read my books, listen to my morning news shows. I generally take the same route from here to there. Throughout my day, my week, these routines are followed. Most of my days, most of my weeks are spent with the more or less the same people, doing more or less the same things, going to more or less the same places. I like routines---in my schedule, in my habits, and in my tastes.

Of course, the problem with routine is that it can turn boring. One can, (I can), miss the joy that comes in going to new places, meeting new people, trying new foods, new routes, new authors. The problem with routine is that well "its routine".

Even faith can turn routine. Here we are celebrating another Easter. Another Easter, commemorating the Resurrection of Jesus. Another Easter, celebrating God's victory over death and the grave. Another Easter celebrating the gift of resurrection promised to us at our Baptism. "Ho hum. Another Easter. It is so routine."

Whenever I read Mark's Gospel of Easter. I am shaken out of my routine. When I read Mark's account of Easter, I actually get excited! Mark ends his account of Easter, with these startling words: The young man tells the women at the tomb, "go, and tell the disciples and Peter that Jesus is going ahead of them to Galilee." But, after receiving these clear and specific instructions Mark continues: "So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid."

"They were afraid." These startling words end not only Mark's Easter account, they are in fact the last words of his Gospel. All the miracles, all the teachings, all the healings, the suffering, death, and resurrection have been recorded, have been written down. Now Mark ends his Gospel not with joy and celebration in the resurrection, but with the first witnesses "afraid".

(Now, if you go home and pull out your bibles, many of them will have verses following this. You might find verses called "another ending", and a "shorter addition". But, most scholars believe that these extra verses were not part of Mark's original Gospel. Early Christian writers, after Mark, were so scandalized by note of fear with which Mark had ended his Gospel, that they added their own spin to the Gospel. They added some nicer and gentler verses so Mark would be ended in hope.)

What does this morning's Easter Gospel offer us, as is? What hope can we find in the fear filled ending of Mark's Gospel?

Mark's Gospel reminds us that the good news of the Resurrection has always been received in fear. He does not tell us why the women were afraid, of the young man, and his news? Perhaps. Might they also been afraid of going to the disciples and Peter? What chance did they have of being believed by these men? Would they just write them off as dreamy, starry eyed women?

Maybe they were afraid because they knew that this "good news" would mean dramatic change in their life. It is one thing to follow Jesus as a teacher, even a great teacher, even the Messiah. But, to follow him as one who was raised from the dead. This certainly raises the ante. To follow him as a dead and resurrected teacher means they have to take him even more seriously. His teachings of forgiveness, of justice, of peace, of service

to the poor, or welcoming the outcasts, or sharing God's love are "nice" ideas when presented by a good teacher. But, when they come from a man who died and was raised, they become not only nice, but they are essential, indeed they are vital. It's not so easy to disregard the teachings of Jesus, when he teaches as the Risen One.

Perhaps, they are frightened, because they know that life after resurrection will never be as life was before the resurrection. If Jesus is truly raised, then, the old way of doing things, the old routines were dead and gone. In fact, to go to Peter and the disciples, to risk ridicule, and to seek forgiveness and reconciliation with those who abandoned and betrayed Jesus is a first frightening action asked for after the resurrection.

Perhaps they are frightened by the realization that the leaders of Rome and the religious leaders of Jerusalem will not easily accept the news of His Resurrection. Pilate had in effect declared resurrection to be illegal by sealing the tomb and guarding it with his soldiers. If Jesus was a threat before his resurrection, he will certainly be even more of a threat after the resurrection. Surely the Romans, and the chief priests will seek deal swiftly with Jesus and his followers. With Jesus dead in the tomb, they women could return to their homes, and go back to living as they did before Jesus came into their lives. But, if he is raised, then....truly their lives will never be the same again.

Is it any wonder they said nothing. Is it any wonder they were afraid?

Whatever they were afraid of, Mark –and his readers- knew these women, Mary Magdalene, Mary, and Salome eventually overcame their fear. The good news of the resurrection *was* passed on to Peter and the disciples. These women overcame their fear and became the first evangelists, they were the first to announce the good news that Jesus has been raised.

Mark is writing his Gospel, some 40 years after the first Easter. Mark is writing his Gospel to a group of Christians who are living in fear. They are afraid as they live with constant threat and persecution. They are afraid as they see more and more brothers and sisters unable to face persecution and renounce their faith in Jesus. They are afraid as they face betrayal at the hands of these former members, their brothers and sisters. They are afraid as they see other brothers and sisters martyred, their bodies used as torches to light the roads out of Rome. Yes, they are afraid. Mark leaves the ending of his Gospel up to the Christians of his day. The woman at the tomb overcame their fear and proclaimed the resurrection. Will the people of Mark's community do the same? The ending of his Gospel is up to them, it is in their hands.

The same question is asked of us. How will we end Mark's Gospel today?

There is much to be afraid of in our world. No need to repeat the litany of our world's ills we all know so well. There is much to fear in our world, for our own families, for our own individual well being and health and the common well being of our community, nation and the world. Fear is all around us. Trying to live as faithful disciples can place us at even greater risk. To live out Jesus message of hope, new life, peace, justice, sacrifice, forgiveness, compassion, hospitality to strangers, love of enemies seem so out of place in our world. If we live them, we risk being labeled as cute, simple, out of touch, ridiculous, naïve. We are afraid of facing such judgments.

And the truth is that even in our day Christians even today, Christians still face persecution, suffering, and death because of their belief.

The ending of the Mark's Easter Gospel is in our hands. Will it end in our silence, will the last words today be, "they said nothing, because they were afraid."? Will we go back to our ordinary routine lives?. Or, will we leave this Church, aware, that if we truly believe the Good News of the Resurrection, if we believe that the Resurrection makes our life new, then our life will be different when we leave this church than when we came in.

The women overcome their fear and proclaimed the Good News that Jesus has been raised. The women overcame their fear and decided that because Jesus was raised, because Jesus was alive, the old routines were dead and gone. We pray for the courage to write the end of the Gospel in the way we live. May our lives proclaim that Jesus is Risen Indeed.