

Isaiah 25:6-9

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Mark 16:1-8

Sermon March 31st, 2024

Jesus' Sometimes Found it Hard to See Unexpected Hope

We have watched many television dramas over the years. From Miami Vice and Beverly Hills 90210 to Dawson's Creek and ER. From Law and Order and Angel to CSI and Bones. From Ex files and Heartland to Murdoch Mysteries and Vampire Diaries. From Griselda and The Crown to Lucifer and the Chosen. The list goes on. We have probably watched as many television dramas as Martin Luther wrote papers and books. And if you don't know how many papers and books Martin Luther wrote, it was north of 600.

And though each drama focuses on a particular context, they all share a similar structure. For most of a season there is a lot of suffering the main character and/or other characters endure. In the season finale, something happens to the main character and/or other characters that gives us a glimmer of hope that finally they will be restored from their suffering. That a happy ending might be in their future. Then something usually happens in this final episode to get us to doubt this happy ending. Then we have to wait till the next season to find out what happens next. To see if this main character and/or other characters will be restored. Or will they have to walk through another season of suffering before experiencing this restoration.

Likewise, Mark tells the story of Jesus with a similar structure to our television dramas. Breaking the different sections of Mark's story into seasons. We see that in every season, Jesus and the disciples encounter suffering as they proclaim God's kingdom come in Galilee, Judea, and Samaria. In every season, there are glimmers of hope. Jesus heals the sick. Jesus preaches good news to the poor. Jesus speaks out on behalf of the marginalized vulnerable people in his community. There are moments in every season that make us think that the main characters, God's people will be restored from their suffering. Then something happens in that final episode of each season to make us doubt this happy ending.

More specifically, in Mark's Easter/resurrection story. The season that supposedly is to be the series finale of this great series. We see the grieving women, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome, coming to the tomb, to finish embalming Jesus' body. After witnessing the horrific pain Jesus suffered in the crucifixion.

This is how this season starts out. With three women who are suffering profoundly.

And then they arrive to see the tomb rolled away. I can imagine the thoughts that come to mind. Did someone take Jesus? Did they forget what tomb they placed Jesus' body in? Was Jesus' crucifixion just one big nightmare?

Then they see a person in white sitting there where Jesus' body had been laid, giving them the news, that Jesus is not dead but alive. Good news. A glimmer of hope that Jesus' ministry isn't dead. Jesus can still restore God's people from their suffering. The Empire hasn't won.

But then the last line in Mark's original story tells us that the women went away afraid and didn't tell anyone. So, here we go again. Having to wait for another season to see if Jesus will indeed restore God's people from their suffering. Or maybe this is the series finale, and we have to wait for a spin off series to continue the story.

Anyways, whether it is watching one of our favorite television dramas or listening to Mark's Easter story, we feel uncomfortable, uneasy, to be left with these types of endings. These unknown, uncertain endings that leave us wondering whether God's restoration of God's people will actually happen or not. Whether we will hear good news or have to stumble through another season of suffering.

The uncertainty was so uncomfortable for the early listeners that a few hundred years later from the original print of Mark, someone added an ending to Mark's story to relieve people of this uncomfortable feeling.

Yes. They do witness the resurrected Christ. Yes. The women do go tell the others.

But for those who listened to the original version of Mark's gospel, they were left with the type of ending we are often left with when watching our television dramas. They were left standing in a place where the future looked anything but certain. Where this promise of restoration seemed a long way off.

Like Mark's Easter story, walking through a transition, a vacancy, as a congregation can leave us feeling uncomfortable. As our future looks anything but certain.

But, like the empty tomb, where the women experience this unexpected hope that though they have not seen Jesus in the flesh, that something amazing is yet to come. That Jesus' ministry isn't dead, but is alive.

We too feel this unexpected hope that with new leadership, with a fresh perspective, we will see that Jesus' ministry isn't dead, but alive. That something amazing is yet to come.

And as we journey together one more time through these fifty days of Easter we will be once again reminded over and over again that Jesus isn't dead. But alive. That the

resurrected Christ appears to us giving us hope that the future no matter how uncertain it is will be a place where we experience new life.

The million-dollar question for us today as we see ourselves standing in the empty tomb is do we have the patience, the things we need, to get through the summer months, to wait for the season premier or the series spin off to begin?

Do we have the patience, the things we need, to walk through the vacancy, to wait for the person God is calling to our congregation to lead us into the future?

Do we have the patience, the things we need, to wait for our next experience of the resurrected Christ?

Let us pray, life-giving God, as we stand in the empty tomb amazed but scared about walking into an unknown future that is anything but certain. As we prepare ourselves to walk through a vacancy as a congregation, worried about what is next. Grant us patience. Open our hearts to hope in your life-giving love that we experience whenever we find ourselves standing in the presence of the resurrected Christ. **Amen.**

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