

God's Will for the New Creation

Mark 16:1-8, plus the shortest "added" ending

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I've been ordained for 38 previous Easters, 4 as an associate pastor when I did not preach on Easter, and last year when I asked Marie to preach, because, as the associate pastor here for 14 years, she had not previously preached on Easter. So, for me, there are 33 previous Easters in which I have preached, and I have never preached from any Scriptural text other than those accepted by the most traditional Biblical scholars. That makes me a conservative in terms of "Easter Scriptures." But, if some preachers and Christians in general find it necessary to declare in "knowing fashion" exactly "how" Jesus was resurrected from the dead in scientific details, or even in definitive, precise faith language, my resistance to attempt to do that, some say, makes me a liberal, or a skeptic. I'll go back to being a conservative in terms of "Easter Scripture" – If Scripture does not say exactly "how" Jesus' resurrection happened in scientific detail, why should I attempt to convince you that you should believe what Scripture doesn't encourage?

Scripture does put forward a story of Jesus being crucified, buried, and surprisingly being what is called "resurrected" from a burial tomb discovered not to contain his body. Then, in varying Gospel accounts, Jesus appears in some recognizable form to disciples who have previously been stunned that his body is not where they thought it would remain – in the tomb.

This year, the church worship staff chose a theme for Lent and Holy Week related to "God's will" and chose the title for today's worship as "God's Will for the New Creation." To support that theme, I am deviating from my usual most conservative approach related to Scripture and including the shortest questionable "added ending" to Mark's gospel account. Actually there are as many as three added endings, but the shortest is one verse: "And all that had been commanded them ("them" being the three women named in verse 1) they told briefly to those around Peter. And afterward Jesus himself sent out through them, from east to west, the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation." 33 words in Greek and 33 words when translated to English.

We don't know who the second "them" is ("Jesus sent out through them . . ."), whether it is the three women, or whether it is the three women PLUS Peter and those around him. Either way, sharing the so-called "sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation" is the result! So we are challenged by the ancient story of Scripture: Is this the result of the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus in our lives still today – that we share the "sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation"?

I've been thinking about how this touches and roots its way into my life. My question, I'm believing at this point in my years, is not, "Is Jesus resurrected?" And my question is not, "How is Jesus resurrected?" Rather, it is this: "Is this story of Jesus being resurrected strong enough to support me as a person commissioned to share the purposes of God in on-going fashion through all the brokenness that continually exists in the world?" Is this story strong enough to support me doing what God in Jesus commissions me to do in the world where I'm commissioned to do it? I don't ask myself that because I am a person who draws a paycheck for serving as a church pastor. I ask myself this because the 33 word added-on ending to Mark reminds me that "I am sent" – with you and innumerable others – to be a vessel or conduit carrying the "sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation."

A structural engineer and an architect always want to know if the foundation of a building or the base of heavy-lift-equipment is strong enough to provide sufficient stabilization to the building or equipment rising from that base. A farmer plowing a field always wants to know if a horse, mule, oxen, or tractor is strong enough to pull the plow through a field of dirt needed to be turned over for planting. As disciples (long ago and still today) risk following Jesus, and he ends up crucified and buried, his disciples (both long ago and still today) should want to know if the stunning news of God continuing a ministry of redeeming love beyond Jesus' broken and buried body is strong enough – (if that stunning news of God continuing a ministry of redeeming love is strong enough) to support one's own grief, agony, doubt, worry, uncertainty, unfaithfulness, sacrifice, and heartbreak all through the time of one's life – and if the news of God continuing a ministry of redeeming love beyond Jesus' broken and buried body is strong enough to continue the giving of New Life to all creation. Referring back to the words of the add-on verse to Mark's gospel account ending, how we are commissioned to share the "sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation" – "eternal salvation" – hardly at all means "heaven in the clouds," but "what is 'in time' and 'beyond time' that God is 'making whole.'" Are you influenced in your life for sharing the word and the reality that God is still at work in-time and beyond-time for the world's being made whole?

I can't tell you how I believe the answer is "yes," because – amid the legitimate questions of logic and science, I'm not certain why I believe; but I can tell you it is not because science or theology or philosophy proves it to me. I can tell you that through my own grief, agony, doubt, worry, uncertainty, unfaithfulness, and heartbreak, I have become convinced that this story of Jesus being resurrected is strong enough to support me doing what the story says that God in Jesus commissions me to do in the world where I'm commissioned to do it: to share "the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation" – that God is working still through people like you and me and others to make the world "whole" – even beyond what our eyes can see and our minds calculate or reason.

Someone has said that this is a matter of Tragedy and Death always seeming to have the upper hand, but just when it seems Tragedy and Death absolutely do have the upper hand, an emergence of grace as life-made-new somehow occurs. I can only speak and confess and testify for myself. Your searching of soul and mind as related to your life, and the commissioning which the story says God in Jesus seeks of you, is a searching of which you are the primary evaluator, from the light of God's Spirit.

You cannot do that searching for me any more than I can do that searching for you; but like disciples long ago, we can search our souls and minds together – with God's help – to experience ways we are commissioned to keep on sharing "the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation" – God showing ways in Jesus Christ that cross and resurrection extend through human lives and history. Both. For the world being made whole.

So maybe the preacher today needs to say no more. Momentarily, we will sing together the the words and the tune combined by Robert Lowry in 1869, "My Life Flows On in Endless Song." It concludes, "Since Christ is Lord of heaven and earth, how can I keep from singing?" We can add what Robert Lowry additionally believed: "Since Christ is Lord of heaven and earth, how can I keep from serving?" – All honor and praise be to God. (Hymn number 821.)