

“Really, Truly, Fully Living”

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Mark 16:1-8

When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. ² And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. ³ They had been saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?” ⁴ When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. ⁵ As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. ⁶ But he said to them, “Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. ⁷ But 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.” ⁸ 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.

Did you hear that? Mark’s gospel account says, “They ran away.” How often do we run away from the surprises of life?

The women had come to do an ordinary task after an extraordinary week. They could not prepare Jesus’ body on Friday. They did not have time before the sun set and the sabbath began. Saturday evening when the sabbath ended, they’d gone into the market and bought spices so that in the morning they could prepare Jesus’ body.

One of the women probably took charge, “We’ll meet at the gate at sun-up.” Then, come morning, they walked to the tomb together, speaking in quiet tones as they went.

“I’d seen the crosses outside the city, but I’d never watched anyone die on one of them.”

“And to think it was Jesus who never hurt anyone.”

Maybe there were tears; maybe tears were used up on Friday and Saturday. They walked sorrowfully, sometimes huddled together, sometimes apart. Talking... about leaders who had done this and about disciples who had deserted Jesus. Wondering who would help them roll the stone away. Speculating, about what was next for any of them now that their light and Lord was dead.

Up to this point it *is* a relatively ordinary morning. The sun rises. The women rise as well. When someone dies, they share the task of preparing the body. Even as they grieve Jesus’ death, the role they play is familiar. There is a comfort in it.

Yet when they arrive at the tomb, they enter new territory. The stone is rolled back, and a messenger, all in white, tells them: “Don’t be alarmed.” (Too late for that.) “You’re looking for Jesus but he’s been raised. He’s not here.”

This messenger from God says other things but maybe they don’t hear. They are so stunned and afraid that they just run. They don’t look around. They don’t tell Peter and the others. They flee.

This is where the gospel writer Mark closes his account of the good news about Jesus Christ, according to many of the oldest Greek texts. Later, others add more verses – both a Shorter and a Longer Ending – that you can read when you get home or tomorrow during your devotions.

Throughout his gospel account, Mark exercises brevity, relating his message with as few words as possible, then moving on to the next piece of the story. His favorite word seems to be “suddenly.” In seminary, we read a book entitled *Master of Surprise*. That’s Mark. He leaves it to us to think, talk and pray about what we read, and to work out the deeper meanings on our own. People had been doing this in the 40 years since Jesus died and he trusted that

we would continue to do so.

Today, we read, “The women ran away and didn’t say anything.” Running is a common response when life pulls the rug out from under us. We have two choices really: fight or flight.

During my TKD years, when things were bad, I liked to practice forms in the yard or kick the bag in the basement. Sitting down to the piano also does the trick. Whether you zumba, yell at the TV or garden, it’s fight or flight.

Eventually, the adrenaline subsides. Our minds kick into gear. The Marys and Salome tell somebody about their adventure. That person tells somebody else who tells another person. The tomb is inspected. No body is found. And the reality that Christ has been raised slowly sinks in. Hallelujah!

In the musical *Company*, it’s his 35th birthday and Robert doesn’t know if he should just be content with his lot or if he should wish for a romantic partner when he blows out the candles. In the course of the story, he begins to make sense of his life. *Company* offers an entertaining look at relationships, vulnerability, and ‘being alive.’

I haven’t seen the show but that description – specifically relationships, vulnerability, and ‘being alive’ – sounds like God’s hope for all of us. Since before the first writers scratched out the first bible stories, God has been trying to get our attention, putting up with us chasing after things that could not satisfy, listening as we promised to follow and then watching as we went another way. And still, God kept reaching out.

Jesus Christ is the grandest part of God’s plan. Through Jesus’ ministry, we learn how truly vast God’s love is and that we are supposed to be a part of it. We learn that being connected requires vulnerability more than strength (Strength is easier. Vulnerability requires a lifetime’s effort). We learn that God’s hope is for every one of us to really and truly live – abundantly. Jesus says that’s why he came – so that all of us, the ones we like and the ones we don’t like – can have life, abundantly.

How’s that working for you? You’re here this morning so I’m guessing that you are at least nominally religious. With that assumption, I’ll offer a few ideas. First though, a reminder that abundant life is not about what we have or what we get. It’s about how we live as stewards of what we receive from God.

Okay. To live fully, we have to be in the present. In serving God, we serve The Great I-Am, not the Great I-Was or the Great I-Will-Be. God is present in our lives in every moment. We need to be present too. It sounds good, yet living in the present is tough. How often do we find ourselves stuck in our past? Or dreaming into the future? The past is familiar, comfortable. Good or bad, we’re used to it. What’s ahead, potentially wonderful though it may be, is still unknown. That scares us. We’d rather live “back when” or dream about “someday” than step out in faith and create a brand new day with possibilities for tomorrow.

When we live in the past, we become dissatisfied with our present lives. We miss God's activity in our midst. Instead of being thankful for God’s grace, we complain, wishing for what used to be. When Naomi returns to Bethlehem with Ruth, she lamented, "I went away full, but the Lord has returned me empty." Naomi could not see that though she had lost much, she had also gained a devoted daughter-in-law. Naomi was not empty, but she could only see a bleak future, stuck as she was in how things used to be.

Live in the present. Second, to live abundantly, accept that you are not in control. This one is hard too. How many of us have waited for something – a relationship, a promotion, anything – that just hasn’t come? My son Jared was born soon after I married. I never expected to wait ten years before Kellyn arrived. For years, I waited. I begged. I pleaded. I grieved. Yet life does not deliver things on our schedule. For that matter, there is no guarantee that just because we want something badly, that it will ever come to us.

When we practice living in the present, we can learn to be content with whatever is – or is not – a part of our lives. When we accept that we’re not so much in control of our lives as we like to think, we’re less influenced by expectations of people around us. We can loosen the tight-fisted hold we have on our own expectations. And we can enjoy the quiet as well as the crazy moments of life without stressing about what we don’t have.

Finally, besides living in the present and letting go of the illusion of control, when we want to really, truly and fully live, we need to notice what drives us. Many lives are governed by fear. Even if fear doesn't control our lives, it visits each of us. And it can take up permanent residence without us noticing. No wonder the bible says, "Don't be afraid" in so many places.

Scripture calls us to let the peace of God reign in our hearts. When we let God's peace in, our minds quiet. We let go of illusions. We release our fears. Through the seasons of our lives, we can let our hearts become troubled. You know what it is when it happens. Then, we can find ourselves doing as Peter did when he stepped out of the boat: we focus on the storm around us. We forget that God as Spirit is always with us. We start to sink.

When we let God's peace pervade our being, we draw another step closer to that abundant life. As we celebrate the resurrection, we're reminded that we are called to be Easter people. We're called to live out the compassion and justice Jesus modeled during his time among us. We're called to trust in God, and trusting, to abide in the peace that comes with it. And we are called to live fully, with our whole being, as God has always intended what we would do. Really, truly, fully living.