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Easter Sunday
Mark 16:1-8

RENDEZVOUS WITH JESUS

Some years it seems we appreciate the Easter message more than others. And this second Easter in the shadow of the pandemic feels like one of those Easters. As vaccinations become more available, it feels a bit like we are emerging from our tombs into life once again. There is a fresh feeling of hope in the air. However, the virus is still infecting, and sickening, and killing people, and we still need to exercise caution and restraint, and the new strains of the virus are indeed cause for concern. So, we have not yet fully emerged from the tomb from all that this past year has brought to us, with its staggering loss of life, and anxieties, and disruptions, and injustices; we have not yet left the tomb. But there just beyond the doorway, we can see signs of new of life, the new life we desperately long for. So we are *more* than ready to hear about resurrection.

The Gospel of Mark, however, gives us an odd resurrection story. We come today looking for the resurrected Jesus but he's not even in the story! Unlike the other 3 gospel accounts of Matthew, Luke, and John where Jesus makes an appearance that first Easter morning, Mark's Easter story gives us no sighting of the resurrected Jesus. Instead, we stand alongside those first 3 women at the tomb who are simply *told* that Jesus has been resurrected. The young man at the tomb—perhaps an angel?—tells the women, “you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here.” Neither the women at the tomb nor we today in reading this story are given a sighting of the resurrected One.

If you look in your Bible at Mark chapter 16, you will see other verses that follow our reading today, verses in which the Resurrected Jesus *does* in fact appear. But it is universally

accepted by biblical scholars that these other verses were added on later, by other writers who were embarrassed by what they regarded as Mark's very incomplete Resurrection account. Most scholars agree that Mark's original ending concludes where we concluded our reading today: with the women being told about the resurrection without ever seeing Jesus himself.

But Mark's Easter message does not leave us empty handed. The angelic figure in the tomb tells the women, "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." The women are directed out of the tomb and into the future. A rendezvous with the Resurrected Jesus awaits them. And what we proclaim today is that a rendezvous with the Resurrected Jesus awaits us.

You know, many people mistakenly regard the Bible as a book about the past. And while it is true that the Bible is a set of ancient writings, the primary direction of the Bible is not backward but rather forward. We turn to the ancient stories of the Bible because in them we discover a God who speaks to our present and who offers hope for the future.

The women at the tomb that first Easter were overcome with sorrow and grief by what had taken place three days earlier. It is the past and its horrors and tragedy that occupy their hearts and minds that morning. The angelic figure at the tomb names it. He says, "you are seeking Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified." The past tense. But the angelic figure then gives them news that transforms their present and opens to them a new future. "He has been raised. Go, tell his disciples he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you."

A rendezvous with Jesus awaits them!

But how can these women trust that this encounter with the Resurrection will indeed take place? Well, Jesus told them. And more importantly, Jesus *showed* them. Maybe, after the

women left the tomb and had a chance to calm down from such disorienting news, maybe the angelic figure's words "he has been raised," would trigger in their minds a memory—a memory of when and where they had heard and seen that same message throughout Jesus' life and ministry. When the angelic figure in the tomb said Jesus "has been raised," he used the Greek word *egeiro*, meaning "raised up." This same Greek word, *egeiro* surfaces over and over again in Mark's gospel.

When Peter's mother-in-law is sick in bed with a life-threatening illness, Jesus comes into the house, takes her by the hand and "raises her up." *Egeiro* is the word used. And she is healed.

When a paralyzed man is brought to Jesus, Jesus heals the man telling him, "stand up, take your mat, and go to your home," using the word *egeiro*, "rise up."

When Jesus encounters a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath day when no work is supposed to be done, Jesus is moved by compassion and says to him "Come forward," *egeiro*, "rise up." And even though it upsets the religious leaders, Jesus heals him.

When a little girl falls fatally ill and dies, Jesus enters the home, takes her by the hand and says to her, "Little girl, get up!" *Egeiro!* Rise up! And she is restored to life.

When a little boy falls to the ground, convulsing from a seizure, Jesus takes the boy's hand and "lifted him up." *Egeiro*. He raised him up.

It turns out that resurrections are everywhere in the Gospel of Mark! We thought resurrection was something that happened *to* Jesus at the end of the gospel. But as it turns out, Jesus' life has been a ministry of resurrection.

How can we trust that the resurrected Jesus will indeed show up as promised, that he will meet us in our pain, confusion, and fears, that he will forgive us and heal us and transform us,

that he will raise us to new life? We can trust that the resurrected Jesus will meet us as promised because we have witnessed what he has done time and time again. Jesus meets people in their Good Friday moments and raises them to new life. That is what Easter is about—about God’s victory, not just once but God’s repeated victory, over every kind of disease and death.

You know, a *rendezvous* is a meeting of two or more parties at an agreed upon time and place. The women at the tomb and the other disciples were told to meet Jesus in Galilee. The Resurrection leads them forward from the tomb into the future with renewed hope. Often when we talk about “the future” we tend to think of a time rather far off—five or ten years from now. But the future is really only as far away as the very next second. Our encounter with the resurrection is that close. Our appointed rendezvous with resurrection is every moment of our lives, where Christ is beckoning us forward, guiding us forward, offering us hope and a new way of living. It is every time we are hurting and in pain, every time we face our guilt and shame, every time we confront injustice and wrongdoing, every time we are overcome by fear, every time we are challenged to give away our time or resources for others, and every moment when we find it hard to put one foot in front of the other. And the appointed place for this meeting with the resurrected Christ is our daily, ordinary lives, where struggles and joys, where sorrow and challenges, where injuries and burdens are experienced. Jesus meets us in all our Good Friday moments and raises us to new life with his transforming love and grace.

And then he looks at us and says, “Follow me.” He calls us to *join* him in a ministry of resurrection.

Across our nation right now, there are thousands of women, mostly women, who are quietly and patiently doing the work of resurrection. After hearing about the struggles so many Americans have had in trying to secure vaccination appointments, especially senior citizens

many of whom lack computers or the technological knowledge, these women have jumped in to help complete strangers get appointments. This is by no means an organized venture. Rather, these efforts are independent of one another and often consist of very small numbers of volunteers: two women joining together in the Philadelphia area, three women working together in Ohio, a single woman by herself in Massachusetts. And they sit at their computers for hours at a time, even deep into the night, checking for appointments, and refreshing registration pages, over and over again, until they are finally able to make that life-saving phone call: “I’ve got you an appointment.”

The resurrection message leads us forward in hope. Your life is not defined by your past or even your present. The God of love and mercy, the God life, takes us by the hand saying, “*Egeiro.*” Rise up! And God leads us forward to where the Resurrected Christ awaits us.