

Sunrise Sermon: Where God Meets Ordinary People

Year B, Easter

[Isaiah 25:6-9; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; Acts 10:34-43; Mark 16:1-8; John 20:1-18](#)

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Rev. Catherine A. Merrill

The reading from Mark begins with three women heading to a tomb where a man they loved beyond the end¹ had been laid to rest three days before (Mark 16:1). They're carrying spices which would be rubbed on the body (Mark 16:1) to combat the smell. But after three days, the spices aren't going to be able to do much. Plus there's that huge rock at the entrance to the tomb that's going to take some serious muscle to move.

Let's be clear. These women are not the important people who control the religious and political scene in Israel.² They're not the followers of Jesus who get put in front of crowds to preach and teach, to heal and cast out demons. All the important people of the world know that Jesus of Nazareth is dead. His chapter is closed and life can get back to normal, without all the disruption he was causing. All the important people have already started to get on with their daily lives, with the activities that Jesus' focus on loving God and loving your neighbor had interrupted.

These women will probably get back to regular life soon. They'll go back to cooking and cleaning and looking after their kids and their elders. They'll go back to doing all the innumerable chores that it takes to keep body and soul together when you have to raise all your own food and make all your own clothes and heal all your own injuries and illnesses. But first the women are going to deal with the ginormous rock and the smell. They're going to do the very last thing they can do for their friend and relative. Because that's what you do when you're not an important person. You do the best you can with what you have, even as life just gets more and more complicated.³

When they encounter the young man at the tomb, they must know he's an angel, because he shows up in full on angel mode. All in white. Where you don't expect to see anyone. Saying "Do not be alarmed." (Mark 16:6) That's straight out of *How to Be an Angel 101*. They encounter the angel, he tells them that Jesus is risen and he is not here (Mark 16:6). Which is crazy talk. And crazy talk is also right out of *How to Be an Angel 101*. The angel tells them to look at the empty tomb and see the place where Jesus' body had been laid (Mark 16:6). They can see the place is empty with their own eyes.

Then the angel tells them to take a message to the disciples (Mark 16:7). That's when the women freak out, they run away and they don't tell anyone anything (Mark 16:8). And who can blame them? They were just trying to get one thing done before diving into the unending challenges of their daily life. What they were trying to do was hopeless, the smell and the rock were going to defeat them, you can see that from the outside. But you can also see that they were going to try. They were going to try to do something that needed to be done. Like house

¹ Halford E. Luccock, "The Gospel According to St. Matthew: Exposition," vol. 7 in *The Interpreter's Bible: The Holy Bible in the King James and Revised Standard Versions with General Articles and Introduction, Exegesis, Exposition for Each Book of the Bible*, ed. George Arthur Buttrick, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1951), 911.

² Serene Jones, "Easter Vigil, Theological Perspective, Mark 16:1-8" in *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary, Year B, Volume 2*, ed. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008], 352.

³ Jones, "Easter Vigil, Theological Perspective, Mark 16:1-8", 354.

training a new puppy. Like organizing a parent with Alzheimer's. Like getting to the gym four times a week and eating organic. You can do it and have an ordinary life. But it takes an enormous amount of effort and a huge amount of attention. The whole thing is a long shot at best.

So it's not surprising that they freak out and run away. And who is going to believe three very not important women that God had reached into the flow of human history and changed its course? Who is going to believe three women that God has defeated Death? Seriously. That message is way above their pay grade.

This morning's reading from the Prophet Isaiah was written about a 1,000 years before Jesus was born. Like people everywhere and in every time, we celebrate being together and God's goodness to us by eating and drinking special meals. Isaiah describes one that sounds delicious, full of well-aged wines and rich food with marrow (Isaiah 25:6). Like many of the meals that will be served to families later today, the special dishes we cook get extras added in, a cut of butter, a tablespoon of cream, a dash of Madeira... rich food with marrow.

What's harder to notice in the reading from Isaiah is that God too is having a meal. On the day of the Lord, God will swallow first the shroud of mourning that is spread over all nations and then swallow up death forever (Isaiah 25:7).⁴ We know that that day has not yet come. All the tears have not been wiped from all the faces (Isaiah 25:8). But the invitation has been given.⁵ We have been asked to come to the feast that God has prepared for us and longs to celebrate with us.

So, it isn't like the angel was the first to introduce the concept of God defeating death. But it had been over a 1,000 years. Like us, the women knew that Death still roamed the earth taking away the people we love. Like us, the women knew God had promised to do something about it. Like us, these ordinary women were living in the in-between space, between the promise and the fulfillment. So it's not surprising that the Good News they were given, that Jesus had Risen, was all too much, and they ran away and kept their mouths shut. If we're honest, most of us would have done the same.

So as day breaks on this Easter morning, look at this story that you have heard many times before and realize what God is saying through it. God speaks to the ordinary people who are doing their best and are overwhelmed with life.⁶ God is with you when you take on tasks that seem impossibly difficult and probably won't work out the way you want them to. God knows you are living in the in-between space because God is there with you too. And when you freak out and run away from God and don't say anything about how you felt God's love today unexpectedly when you were picking the kids up at school or when a colleague noticed how unbelievably tight and elegant your code was. When that happens, notice what the story says. God will meet you in Galilee. God will meet you at home. Not because you are perfect. Not because you are sinless. But because God is Risen in this world. Alleluia. He is Risen indeed.

⁴ Glenn T. Miller, "Isaiah 25:6-9." *Interpretation* 49, no. 2 (1995): 176.

⁵ Miller, 178.

⁶ Jones, "Easter Vigil, Theological Perspective, Mark 16:1-8", 356.