

## What Will You Do? 4.12.2020

("Original" Ending of Mark, Mark 16:8)

*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." 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.*

[Sung] *I got this feelin' inside my bones*

*It goes electric, wavy when I turn it on*

*All through my city, all through my home*

*We're flyin' up, no ceilin', when we in our zone...*

("Can't Stop This Feeling" by Justin Timberlake)

One of my favorite movies is based on one of my favorite board games: Clue. One of the reasons I love the film is because of the three endings! When it was in the theaters, the ending you saw was random, and if you wanted to see a different ending you had to see it more than once. Nowadays with DVD and Bluray when you start the movie at home you can either click "show with a random ending" or "show with all possible endings."

Of the 4 gospels, the Gospel according to Mark is my favorite. One of

the reasons I connect with Mark is because of the three endings. According to some biblical scholars, the original ending says, "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." Mark finishes his Gospel in the same way he begins it—quickly, without commentary or explanation.

Most scholars think that Mark's gospel was written around 70 C.E. In 66 CE the Jewish people rose up against their oppressors, the Roman Empire. Four years later, in 70 CE, Roman legions, under Titus, retook and destroyed much of Jerusalem and the Second Temple. Part of the reason scholars believe this is when the Gospel of Mark was written, is because of how quickly it reads, with the word "immediately" used 17 times. It's abrupt writing style, compared to the other Gospels, and the way that the author writes about the disciples – as people who simply NEVER understood what Jesus was doing or trying to teach them – all points to something written at a time of great distress.

If we read between the lines, the original ending says, "the disciples

all fled. They fled Jesus' side, then they fled the tomb, and in their terror-filled state they didn't tell anyone what they had seen. So tell me," the author seems to say, "what will you do? What will you do with this Good News? Will you keep it secret because of your fear? Or will you go out into the world and share the Good News of Jesus' resurrection with all of creation?"

The second ending of Mark adds on these words: "*And all that had been commanded [to the women] 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.*" Some scholars suggest that this ending was added on later for two reasons.

First, because the message of Jesus' resurrection HAD spread – so someone had clearly said something to someone about what they had seen. Second, it was to finish the gospel (which was most likely written by a man) in a humble way: as it is the women who take center stage in this greatest miracle of Jesus. The heavenly messenger sends the women with a commission to tell the disciples

what has happened, making the women the first preachers of the resurrection.

Even with this added ending, the one who wrote it is saying “this Good News is for everyone. It's message is sacred and will never die. What will you do with it? What will you do with this Good News? Will you keep it secret out of fear? Or will you go out into the world and share the Good News of Jesus' resurrection with all creation?”

But what is the Good News, you might ask? What is it that I tell people, especially during this pandemic? To answer that question, I suggest that we need to look, once again, at crucifixion. In their book *Saving Paradise* authors Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Ann Parker, talk about it this way: “Crucifixion was designed to destroy bodies and identities. [It] was used against the underclasses and slaves and was regarded as so shameful that even victims families would not speak of it. It functioned to fragment communities, tearing the fabric of even the strongest bonds of connection and commitment.”

Essentially, if a member of your family or community was crucified, no one would ever speak your name again, because of the shame. People murdered by crucifixion were wiped of their humanity, their life, and their very existence in the hearts and minds of those left behind.

Brock and Parker explain that the Gospels, specifically the Passion narratives, broke the silence about the shame and fear that the crucifixion injected. The lament within the Passion narratives claimed powers that the shame of crucifixion was meant to destroy: dignity, courage, love, truth-telling, and creativity.

Here's the critical point that Brock and Parker make: "In telling [Jesus'] story, his community remembered his name and claimed the death-defying power by saying his name aloud. [...] The purpose of such writing is assuredly not to valorize victims, not to praise their suffering as redemptive, not to reveal "true love" as submission and self-sacrifice, and not to say that God requires the passive acceptance of violence. Such interpretations mistakenly answer the abusive use of power with [the act of relinquishing] power. The story of Jesus'

crucifixion, in marked contrast, asserted that the answer to abusive power is the courageous and decisive employment of the powers of life—to do deeds in Jesus' name.”

We are in a time when the “old ways” of looking at the crucifixion of Jesus (as the helpless sacrificial lamb, to a wrathful God) no longer rings true for many Christians. When I say “old ways” I mean those ways that began to be imposed on the Way of Jesus by the Roman Empire when it claimed Christianity as it's state religion in the late 300's C.E.

From the time of Jesus Resurrection until 400 C.E. Christians were viciously persecuted by the Roman Empire by the 10's of thousands. Then, Emperor Constantine decided to become Christian and the theology behind the death and resurrection of Jesus began to change.

In the next 500 years, the Good News went from Paradise (God's Kingdom) being present in the here and now, to only after one died. It went from a message of seeking justice and vindication for the poor and oppressed to a message of “keep your head down,” “avoid the

devil at all costs,” and “if you're good at being perfect you just might make it to heaven after you die.” It went from a message of God's love being the way, the truth, and the life for all people – no matter what, to a message of “exclusion for all those that don't toe the party-line.”

In giving voice to the Good News, we reclaim the truth of the meaning behind Jesus death, the truth that we feel in our bones to be true. As Brock and Parker explain it, “Telling the truth about Jesus's crucifixion has abiding importance. To break silence whenever violence is used to shame, instill fear, fragment human community, or suppress those who advocate for justice is life-giving. [...] the Passion narratives defied the power of crucifixion to silence Jesus' movement. In doing so they placed before this movement the choice to tell the truth and live by ethical grace. They said life is found by surviving the worst a community can imagine, in lamenting the consequences of imperialism, and in holding fast to the core goodness of this world, blessed by divine justice and abundant life.”

If you've been feeling queasy about the theology we've been taught,

that's been taught for the past 1000 years – you're not alone. Brock and Parker suggest that “The Resurrection was the gift of persistent love, stronger than death. [...] It was not, however, a [...] final solution to life's struggles and conflicts.” The path of Jesus is all about defying the power of death with the ever more enduring power of life. In this time of COVID-19, we need to do all we can, even while physically apart, to defy the power of death with the ever more enduring power of life. We need to let our rage, protest, and lamentation about what is happening to the outcasts of US Society, during this pandemic - ring out! Rage, protest, and lamentation carry the energy of the power of life, as do acts of compassion, generosity, and justice.

So, dear Beloved in Christ, what will you do to defy the shame of the crucifixion today and everyday? Will you share the message of God's Love and Justice with every breath? However you choose to share the message, remember that love is the Way. Love is the way, the truth, and the life.

I pray that we will work together to disassemble the imperialism in



our time. I pray that we will work together to tell all who need the Light of Christ that they are ALREADY in God's Love, because of who they are and where they are on their life's journey. I pray that we will work together to shift the definition of our faith from the imperial salvation through death to the Divine salvation through the sacred and enduring power of life. Whatever we do, I pray that we won't ever give up. Because God will NEVER give up on us.

[Sung] *I got that sunshine in my pocket  
Got that good soul in my feet  
I feel that hot blood in my body when it drops (ooh)  
I can't take my eyes up off it, movin' so phenomenally  
Room on lock, the way we rock it, so don't stop...*  
(“Can't Stop This Feeling” by Justin Timberlake)

Amen.