

4-4-21

Easter 10:30 am

Mark 16:1-8

Is That It?

Father John Spalding was the priest at St. James Church and school in Kentucky where Deanna was the music teacher many years ago now. A part of Deanna's job involved keeping a choir of sixth graders ready to sing at funerals in the parish. It didn't matter if school was in session or not, she had to round up those sixth graders and be the choir when a Catholic in that community died. You could always tell when the deceased was someone Father hadn't known very well. The liturgy for a funeral was the same whoever was being buried, but the sermon usually had something distinctive to the person whose life was being remembered. But you could usually tell when Father didn't know them well. They got the stock Father Spalding sermon. I don't remember what Scripture he read, but he always quoted from a Peggy Lee song called, "Is That All There Is?" It's a sad song that some of you remember. I must have been listening to The Temptations and Three Dog Night the year that song came out, but I heard all about it from Father Spalding. It's a sad song, doesn't fit very well with the bright and happy mood we're in this morning. Over and over again, the song tells stories that could have happened to any of us and then asks, "Is that all there is? Is that all there is to a fire, to a circus, to love—is that all there is? It was one of those songs in which she'd talk a while, then sing a while, but it never got very hopeful. Father's funeral sermons didn't either. He'd talk about fragile and fleeting nature of life. And then he'd ask, "Is that all there is?" I don't remember ever hearing an answer from him.

If Mark's Gospel were all we had to go on, we might walk away from the Easter story with the same question: Is that it? Is that all there is?

We believe that Mark was the first of the four to write a Gospel, a record of the life and witness of Jesus and the redemption that his life, death, and resurrection brings to us. I guess it makes sense, then, that Matthew, Mark, and Luke all add to his story. Mark's account, all by itself, is a little unsatisfying. The main thing is, there is no Jesus. Not even a fleeting glimpse.

Early on Sunday morning, three women come to the tomb to finish the work they had not been able to finish before the Sabbath set in. Now, you know and I know that Jesus had tried to tell them that he was more important than the Sabbath, and you know and I know that Jesus had done things on the Sabbath he wasn't supposed to do. But we also know where that got him. So we won't fault these three women for waiting until this morning to finish their task. We won't be too hard on them because they were worrying about mundane things like whether they could find someone to roll the stone away from the door of the tomb so they could get in to do what they had come to do and move on. The events of the days they had just gone through were still fresh in their minds, and they just couldn't grasp all that we think they should have believed as they went there that morning. All of us who have ever buried someone we love know that there's not a lot of time for reflection and pondering in those days. You just get through them. And that's what the two Marys and Salome had done. Like everyone else who had been there through it all. They just got through it. And now they had come to finish this unpleasant work and get it behind them.

Imagine, then, their amazement when they arrived to find not only the stone rolled away, but the tomb empty except for that young man in a white robe sitting there where they had seen people put Jesus' body on Friday. And then that man spoke. He told them not to be afraid. Fat chance of that! But he also told them that he knew they were there looking for Jesus, and he told them what they should have known, if they hadn't had so many

other things on their mind. He's not here. There. See for yourself. You saw them place him here just the other day and now he's gone.

But he wasn't through. Go, he told them. Go and tell the others, and be sure to tell Peter, don't leave him out, regardless of how foolish he was this week—go and tell them that Jesus has gone to Galilee and that he will meet you there just as he told you he would. No, go. Tell them. He's waiting for you.

But there's no Jesus. He's not hiding behind an olive tree somewhere. He's not behind the big rock. He has gone to Galilee, where he told them he would be. And he was waiting for them to meet him there.

There are all kinds of ways those women could have responded to that news. Joy comes to mind. It is, after all Easter morning and they've just heard that Jesus is alive. More questions? I'm sure there were some, but there was no time for them now. Dismissal? Maybe they just wanted to get away from there before something even more dramatic happened, something that involved them. And then there is fear. That's how Mark says they responded. They were so terrified by what they saw and didn't see, by what they heard and didn't hear that they ran away and didn't tell anybody anything.

So is that it? Is that all there is?

Obviously not because we're all here, wanting, needing to hear this story again. Frustrated because the folks who came to sunrise got John's story and we get Mark. But the story didn't end with their fear. Not only did Matthew, Mark, and Luke decide there was more to tell, the Church and faithful people for generations have told and retold the story of Resurrection so many times that we can't remember whose version of it we know. In truth, what we know comes from all of them and from faithful Sunday School teacher and Bible study leaders and from thinking we've done our own whether we ever tell anybody about it or not. This fear that paralyzes is not all there is.

The angel in the tomb told those women where Jesus was. Right where he had told them he'd be. Back in Galilee,

where their life together had started. I'm told that's about a six-day walk, which was how they would have traveled in those days. If that was the plan, Jesus must not have trusted his friends to follow it, because when Jesus does appear to them, he comes where they are. Then, another time, he meets them by the sea. We'll get to those stories.

For now, we're left with this one. No Jesus. You just missed him. He was here, but he had gone. He's back out there doing what he came to do. And he's waiting for you to join him.

Back in Galilee is where all this had started. Galilee is where he came when he left the wilderness and all the learning he did there. Galilee is where these women and the disciples had met him, been drawn to him, heard him teach, seen him heal, been drawn into the community he was forming. Galilee was where he had taught them so much.

So much more than they could comprehend. In Mark, probably more than anywhere else in Scripture, the disciples and the other followers of Jesus are about the most thick-headed people we can imagine. They just don't get it. But their reluctance or inability to believe doesn't deter Jesus. He keeps teaching, right up until he died.

So is that what this call is all about? We're getting the band back together? Let's all join up in Galilee and pick up where we left off. After the week we've had, surely this means that happy times are here again! Let's meet up in Galilee and it'll be the good old days all over again!

I've never done a lot of going back to churches I've served after I left. I've gone back a few times to do funerals, but most of those places I've never gone back to after my time there was gone. Deanna went back to the Church in Huntsville once when she was in town to do something with a friend. She still talks about how weird it was. The pastor who followed me there is a friend of ours, so it wasn't that. Some of the people we had known and loved there weren't there anymore. And there were new people, as there should have been. Our friend, Pam, a good

preacher, so it wasn't that. It was just different. It was not the same.

What Jesus was inviting those disciples to wasn't a reunion. It was a continuation of what they had started together.

And what the Jesus who didn't show up for his own Easter celebration calls us to is the same. Our call is never to turn back the clock to how things were. Our call is always to be attentive to his call to tell us who we need to be and what we need do in this place at this time.

The past year has taught us that lesson in ways we would prefer not to have learned. We didn't get to gather for Easter worship together at all last year. We broadcast from Beth and Noggin's back porch and competed with the ducks and the train, but we worshiped together as we could. This year, we are grateful to be here and to have you here with us, but this is not the Easter we're accustomed to. Socially distanced pews. Masks for some. Sanitizer for all of us. No singing. No choir. And some still don't feel good about coming out. Maybe they're waiting on vaccine. Maybe they're between doses. Maybe they're just afraid. It's been a long, rough year. Just let one of us cough this morning and see how we all react.

I know we all want to get back to normal. But we're still trying to figure out what normal is going to be. Pre-Covid life is no longer a realistic goal. Our call is to figure out how we will live and minister and thrive and be whole again in a world in which Covid may never go away, a world that involves booster shots and precautions that will be with us for a while. I saw an ad for a t-shirt that I suspect I'll see in town before long. It says, "When this virus is over, I still don't want some of you near me."

Getting back to normal was not the goal for the people Jesus called to experience his risen presence. And it is not the goal for us as we experience it today. The Resurrection of Jesus has changed the world and us forever. We no longer have to be afraid of death or sin or evil or any of the other powers that try to take control of our lives. Because Jesus died and rose again, we are promised not only a place in heaven, but a life here and now

that is full of meaning and purpose. Even if our life turns out to be something other than we set out for it to be, even if we experience some bumps along the way, even if we have days that make us ask, "Is that all there is?" Life is full of gift and promise because Jesus is risen from the dead. Life is a gift, and we get to participate in deciding what to do with it. We can choose to trust the Risen Christ to lead us to places we have not yet seen instead of longing for things that have gone and need to stay gone.

I wish Jesus had made at least a brief appearance in Mark's story, too, but he was already out there, calling us to follow. Let's go, and see what comes next. The Lord is risen. He is risen indeed! Thanks be to God! Amen.