

So, Now What
Preacher: Rev. Lauren Lorincz
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12:45

I have never had to wrestle with my faith more so than when I was a hospital chaplain at the Cleveland Clinic one summer. Every single day I saw suffering, and I would come home from overnights in particular and walk into my parent's house, get a long hug from my mom and dad, and sometimes I would cry and cry and cry some more. And then my mom would take me out to Bob Evans for breakfast where I shared edited versions of my patient encounters and she would cry over her eggs and coffee. It was a really uplifting time in my life, and yours too for that matter, mom.

Some of you have heard this set-up before, but I was a chaplain intern with four men—a Roman Catholic priest, a Roman Catholic monk, a Disciples of Christ minister, and a former Muslim who converted to Christianity and struggled with what this meant in the midst of his seminary studies. It's like the beginning of a joke, and we all walked into a bar . . . but anyway, I was the only woman in the group and I was the youngest. And I got into more fights with those guys than I even care to discuss.

But I'm telling you about one of the classic arguments today because it was about the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ. One of the guys began to quiz me about my views of the resurrection. To be honest, I have trouble with the concept of the physical resurrection, probably like many of you. The spiritual resurrection makes more sense to me particularly because I appreciate a good metaphor. I explained this to him, though I did say, "But you know, I don't fully understand the power of God, no one does. And if I found out that God did physically raise Jesus from the dead somehow, cool."

In theological lingo, I have a somewhat high Christology. I do believe that Jesus was God incarnate and that is the crux of my faith. I'm not what we jokingly say in the United Church of Christ, a "Unitarian Considering Christ." I'm a UCC minister all about Jesus—he's the center of my faith. Jesus has always helped me get to God.

I think of Jesus, in the helpful words of Monika Hellwig, "As essentially a human person, so wholly attuned to God's will in everything that his presence is in effect the presence of God, and his impact on the world in effect the Word or utterance of God." [1] I can also find a lot of meaning in Marcus Borg's description of the incarnation, not someone known for his high Christology. But Borg views "Jesus as the embodiment and incarnation of the God who is everywhere present. But he is not a visitor from elsewhere, sent to the world by a god 'out there.' He is not different in kind from us but as completely human as we are. In the fully human life of this utterly remarkable Spirit person, we see the incarnation of God." [2]

Bottom line, I love Jesus. And his life and teachings speak to me in a way that makes me feel connected to God, to humanity, to creation, and to myself, and this faith has sustained me throughout my life. I explained all of this to my peer when we were arguing, but it still wasn't good enough. He told me that if I don't believe in the literal bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, he doesn't consider me fully Christian. Clearly the physical resurrection was central to his faith just as the incarnation is central to mine.

But God forgive me, and sorry mom, I wanted to punch him. Honestly, you think you and your spouse get into unwinnable, petty fights sometimes. So this argument went on and on until finally I yelled, "I don't care! I don't care about the physical resurrection versus the spiritual resurrection; I care about what happened next. Why does this matter? What is the greater

meaning? What happens now? That's what I care about most." We decided to agree to disagree and just drop it because we were getting nowhere fast.

I'm telling you about this argument today because that's still where I am. I just don't care that much about having nuanced theological arguments about the spiritual resurrection of Jesus Christ versus the physical resurrection. I think that we should all know what we believe about the resurrection, don't get me wrong, but I'm just not that interested in arguing about our conclusions. Bottom line, I care more about the greater, in some ways more challenging, "so what?" questions. And interestingly enough, that's what Mark seems to care about too.

Mark ends his Gospel, not with seeing a physically resurrected Jesus or even a spiritually resurrected Jesus. Mark ends with a "young man, dressed in a white robe" sitting inside the empty tomb telling the women that Jesus isn't there. "But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee."^[3] And the women run away in terror and amazement, "for they were afraid."^[4]

Later generations of Christians found this ending so unsatisfactory, that they added about twenty verses to Mark's Gospel—these verses deal with Jesus appearing to Mary Magdalene on her own, appearing to two disciples who were walking along in the country, having a final meal with the disciples, commissioning them to go out into the world to make disciples of all nations, and then Jesus ascending into heaven.

But Mark originally ended with the disciples still hiding out after Jesus' crucifixion two days ago and the women running away, terrified out of their minds that Jesus was not in the tomb. This is an ancient cliff hanger. It's like one of those movies where you see the ending and you don't quite get it, you sit there thinking what just happened? Is that the end, seriously?

I'm not too proud to admit that I had to see the first Mission Impossible movie about five times before I finally understood all of the plot and who betrays whom, and who was wearing what mask and when. And Inception, was it a dream within a dream? Was it reality? Or was he still asleep at the end? I don't know. Even if you haven't seen either of those movies, you get the point. Whether it's a book or a movie, you sit there thinking, what just happened?

That's how Mark originally ended his Gospel. It's a cliffhanger. We read it and think, are you serious? The disciples are still in hiding and the women run away in terror and amazement, whatever that means. Well that's wonderful, after all that work and Jesus' terribly painful and traumatic death, the tomb is apparently empty and everyone runs away. So, now what?

And that's where Mark gets us. This is the whole point exactly. So, now what? So what are you going to do about it? For Mark, fear is the opposite of faith. If you have a little bit of faith, you won't be afraid all the time. You won't hide out or run away in terror, you will be able to go out into the world and live out these teachings that Christ taught us. You may be able to even go out and tell someone else about Jesus, not in an overbearing way, but you can say, "Oh yeah, I get a lot out of the Bible, out of going to church, out of my relationship or understanding of God, and here's why."

Mark basically puts this right back on us, the people who just finished reading or hearing his story of Jesus' life and death. Will we let Christ's teachings die with him? Will we just walk away and pretend that we can't really do anything to change what happened? I don't know, will we?

This is supposed to make us a little uncomfortable, a little questioning of ourselves. That's why I love the legend of Mary Magdalene that's emphasized by Eastern Orthodox Christians, that Mary travels to Rome and has the audacity to preach Christ's resurrection to the Roman

Emperor himself. That the egg turns red in his hand when he doesn't believe, that Mary's work assures that Jesus' teachings and his tireless work to create the Kingdom of God here on earth didn't die with him on the cross.

Mary redeems herself after running away in terror and amazement from the tomb. Benedictine sister Joan Chittister says this of Mary Magdalene, "She was there when they were following him in cheering throngs. And she was there when they were taking his entire life . . . She tended his grave and shouted his dying glory and clung to his soul." [5] What an amazing example to all of us as we are confronted with the resurrection story of Jesus Christ today, however we interpret what the resurrection was like and what it means.

Basically, what the final verses from the Gospel of Mark comes down to, what Easter comes down to is how we leave this sanctuary today. Maybe you don't fully understand the physical resurrection versus the spiritual resurrection. I'm not sure that I do completely!

But will we be scared and intimidated by the mystery of it all or will we have just a little bit of faith and do something about it? As Barbara Brown Taylor says, these stories in Mark "are stories about who God is, and how God acts, and what God is like. Mark wrote them down for one reason and one reason alone: 'This is no ordinary man,' he tells us every way he knows how. 'This man is the son of God. Believe it.'" [6]

We can be afraid and run away. Or we can believe that God's love somehow miraculously conquers all, that Jesus' resurrection shows us for all time that love wins, and that we must go out and proclaim it. So, now what? Amen.

[1] Monika Hellwig, "Christology" in *The New and Enlarged Handbook of Christian Theology*, 94.

[2] Marcus Borg and N.T. Wright, "Jesus and God" in *The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions*, 148.

[3] Mark 16:7

[4] Mark 16:8

[5] Joan Chittister, *The Friendship of Women: A Spiritual Tradition*, 51-52.

[6] Barbara Brown Taylor, "One Step at a Time," in *The Preaching Life*, 98.