

“They Said Nothing to Anyone”

Mark 16:1-8

Easter Sunday

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Westminster, Greenville

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I wonder if any of you saw the film, “American Symphony,” the documentary that came out on Netflix late last year?

For those of you who have not seen it yet, it’s about the musician Jon Batiste and the composition of his first symphony...but it’s about a lot more than that.

Batiste, you may know, was the bandleader and musical director on “The Late Show with Stephen Colbert” from 2015 to 2022.

He’s married to Suleika Jaouad, a writer and artist who was diagnosed, in her early 20s, with leukemia....before she ever met Jon Batiste. Jaouad wrote about the experience of being ill, at such a young age, with such a serious disease, in a series of essays in *The New York Times*.

And then later, she turned those essays into a best-selling book.

In the documentary, Batiste and Jaouad are navigating two worlds:

One is his growing success as a musician.

When it’s time for the Grammy awards, Batiste receives 11 nominations, more than anyone else!

The other world is his wife’s illness.

First diagnosed in 2011, it went into remission.

But almost a decade later, it has returned.

In fact, on the same day that the Grammy nominations are announced, Jaouad has to begin her chemotherapy all over again.



There's a mysterious young man, he's dressed in white, and he tells the women that Jesus has been raised, that he's gone ahead of them to Galilee...go, he says, tell his disciples that's where they will find him.

So far, so good, right?  
And what happens next?

***“So they went out from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.”***

What kind of an Easter ending...is that??

Now I know, some of you may have noticed that your Bible has a few more verses after verse 8—but almost all biblical scholars believe that those verses were added after the fact.

They're not original to Mark.  
In the Greek, the original ending actually goes like this:  
***“...and no one anything they told, they were afraid for...”***

He ends his Gospel with a preposition!  
It's not even a complete sentence!

At first blush, it sounds like a very strange way to describe Easter.  
But in my opinion, it's a BRILLIANT way to tell the story of Easter.

Why do I say that?

Because Mark by leaving the ending incomplete, he turns the story around on us.

He personalizes it.

He helps us see our own past, and future, and present in Resurrection light.

What do I mean by that?

To help explain, I'd like to have a little fun with you this Easter morning.

I'd like to invite you to take an Easter ACT exam with me. Do you remember the ACT exam?

I'm gathering from the looks on your faces that maybe this is NOT the Easter gift you were hoping to receive from the pulpit today.

But no worries.

I've got good news.

This Easter ACT is very easy.

1. It will only have three sections.
2. Each section will only have one or two questions.
3. You have unlimited time to think about your answers to those questions.

The first part...is math.

And here's the first question:

Out of all the hundreds of people in the sanctuary, how many of you were at the empty tomb with the women long ago?

That's right—a big, fat ZERO.

And that number leads me to the first reason that I think Mark's Easter story is so excellent. **It has something to teach us...or perhaps remind us...about our PAST.**

You see, Mark's ending to Easter begs the question:  
How did you and I get here today?

If the women said nothing to anyone, how did we end up in these pews?

The only think I can conclude is that when the women left the tomb silent and fearful...they did not remain that way. They must have told someone what they heard, at some point along the way, or you and I would not be sitting in this room today.

So how did they do it?  
How did they move from being silent to bearing witness?  
How did they get from sheer terror to sustained testimony?

According to Mark, it was God.  
It was the power of God, at work in their lives.

The love of God, giving them courage through the gift of one another, to face their fears and go forward in faith.

And it's no different for us.

How did you get here today?  
Was it your wisdom?  
Your good choices?  
Your idea?  
Or was it God's?

Pull out your bulletin insert for me for a moment.  
The portion with all those names.  
All those dedications.  
You know what those names represent, right?

They represent the power of God to be at work in our lives, even when we didn't know that God is at work.

The ones who taught you about God's love.

The ones who gave you measure upon measure of God's grace.

You see, the first part of your Easter ACT exam is to spend some time today...thinking about all the people who shaped you. The people through whom God's love came to you.

The people who are responsible for your presence here, on this Easter day.

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You can finish that part of the exam later this afternoon.

Let's move to the second part.

The second part of your ACT Easter exam is Reading.

And this isn't hard either.

Show of hands...how many of you believe the risen Christ is alive and with each of us in the world today?

Good, good.

Now...I think Mark would agree.

The risen is alive and at work in our lives, and is with us here in this room right now.

But Mark also describes Christ's presence in a slightly different way.

According to our text, the risen Christ is not just with us.

The risen Christ *is going ahead of us*.

“...he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.”

That’s what the women heard at the tomb.

**That means something about our future.**

Not that everything that happens is caused by God, or is the will of God.

There’s too much tragedy in our world, too many unfair losses in our lives, too much injustice to say that everything happens for a reason, or according to a divine plan.

What it does mean is that when things DO NOT happen as God wishes that they would happen....Jesus has gone ahead of us.

Jesus is already there for us.  
Let me put it like this.

Back in 2008, my wife and I were living with our (then) 1 year old son in Indiana. My wife’s mother had died the previous year, and we knew that at some point, we would like to move back to Texas, so that we could be closer to Heather’s father.

In September of that year, we went to visit friends in Dallas.

And I got together with one of my mentors in ministry, the Head of Staff with whom I worked in my first call. I told him what was going on, how we’d really like to get back to Texas to be closer to family, but what were the odds that it could happen?

He told me about a Head of Staff position that had just opened up in Dallas.

It was a good church. A healthy church.  
It would be an excellent fit, he said.  
He encouraged me to apply.  
So I did.

Shortly after I sent the email with my application, my wife and I learned that we were expecting our second child.

It was good news.  
But to be honest, it threw me off a bit.

Having a second child, AND the possibility of moving across the country, all in the same year?

It felt like a lot.  
Maybe I should just wait.  
Just take things one step at a time.

I considered withdrawing the application I had just sent.  
But something felt strange about doing so.  
And I kept going through the Presbyterian call process with the church.

And one thing led to another, and the following year, we moved back to Dallas—with our two-year-old and our two-month-old sons along for the ride.

Why am I telling you this?

Because at THAT moment, in August of 2009, what we did not know, what we could not know, was that 15 months later our younger son would get sick.



And we found ourselves a 25-minute drive away from a terrific Children's Hospital in Dallas. And my wife's father was now a short drive away, so that he could take care of his older grandson when we needed to take our younger son to the hospital.

In the years since all that happened, I've often wondered...what would have happened if I had withdrawn my application for that position?

What was it that made me say, "We can do two big life transitions at one time!"

At the time, I thought it was my ADVENTUROUS SPIRIT that was leading the way!

Now I know better.

It was God.

It was the risen Christ, who had already gone ahead of us,  
who was getting us where we needed to go.

So that's the second part of your ACT Easter exam...

Think about a time in your life, where you did not realize that God was at work, but looking back on it, you can now see that God was work, going ahead of you, leading you, getting you to where you needed to go...

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All of which brings me to the THIRD part of your Easter ACT...don't worry, it's not science.

It's MUSIC.

In the world of music, how many of you are familiar with the word DISSONANCE?

I suspect most, if not all of you know what dissonance is.

But just to make sure we're on the same page, I looked the word up in the dictionary, and it says dissonance is "a simultaneous combination of tones conventionally accepted as being in a state of unrest and needing completion."

Do you recall our opening hymn this morning?  
"Jesus Christ is Risen Today"

What do you think that hymn would sound like if it were played with too much dissonance?

Todd...would you mind giving us an example?

It doesn't sound good at all, does it?

On Easter Sunday, we don't want dissonance.  
Dissonance puts us in a "state of unrest."

It makes it feel like things are incomplete, like we need to do something to resolve the tension.

Huh.

I wonder if that's the point.  
Mark gives us an Easter story...with a bit of tension.  
A bit of dissonance.  
Maybe that tension, that dissonance...is a gift.

A way of keeping our eyes peeled for opportunities to be witnesses to God's love and power, to see our daily lives in Resurrection light.

I mentioned one of my grandfathers in last Sunday's sermon.

I was fortunate to know both of my grandfathers when I was growing up. And my other grandfather, my mother's father, was also an important person in my life.

Even though he lived in California, and I was growing up in Michigan, we saw each other at Christmas every year.

And he made a point to spend time with me.  
Whether it was playing cards on New Year's Eve,  
or going bowling together,  
or in 1989, flying from California,  
to attend my high school graduation...

So when I decided to go to seminary, I wanted to let him know.  
I knew he had been having health difficulties.  
I didn't know the details.

But I called him, and I said:  
"Grandpa, I'm going to seminary in the fall."

He said: "That sounds interesting."

I told him where I was headed.  
He said: "That sounds interesting."

I said: "I'm thinking about becoming a pastor."  
He said: "That sounds interesting."

And it hit home.

He had had a series of small strokes.  
My grandfather would never be the same again.

A year later, he was in a nursing home in California.

I wasn't there, but my uncle and aunt were there. And it was difficult for them, because grief has a way of catching us off-guard.

My aunt, who was a nurse,  
had trouble admitting her dad was dying.

My uncle had trouble saying ANYTHING at that moment.

But a nurse came into the room at one point, and she surveyed the situation—and then she sat down next to my grandfather.

And she took my grandfather's hand in hers,  
and she said:  
"You go with God, Mr. Cooper.  
You go with God."

And a few minutes later, my grandfather died.

Now...what did that nurse do, amidst the dissonance, the unresolved tension in that room?

She didn't just give a blessing to my grandfather.  
Her words, unbeknownst to her, were also were a blessing to me.

Because you know what happened there, right?

The risen Christ was at work in her,  
**getting me where I needed to go.**

And the good news at Easter is that God promises to do the same for you.

So here's your final Easter ACT question:

Do you know how and when and where the risen Christ will show up next in your life?

I'll give you the answer.

No...

But you can be confident it will happen.

Because it won't be your idea.

It will be God's idea.

To use you in ways you cannot plan or predict or foresee.

To send others into your life, to get you where you need to go.

The risen Christ, alive and at work in your life...

Allelulia.

Amen.