

“Afraid?”

Ever been afraid? I have. From the very first monster under my bed to preparing for this sermon—I have been afraid. Now you all know about monsters under the bed, but you may not know about the fear of sermon prep. It began when one person in the congregation told me after the Good Friday service that this whole service better be upbeat, because Passion Sunday and Good Friday were just too much to bear. I can now see why the women fled from the tomb and said nothing to anyone”—they were afraid.

But this is not about me. Mark’s story is about Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome and their fear. So is Mark telling this story to show that women are fearful and only men should be entrusted with telling the story of Jesus raised from the dead? I don’t think so.

When you get home, read Mark’s gospel in one sitting, as fast as you can, and you will notice that the men who follow Jesus never quite get it. They never understand the basic message, they end up in power struggles and are the first ones to run away and deny him. Women are portrayed differently.

The first story is of the hemorrhaging woman who had suffered under male doctors for twelve years. She comes up and touches Jesus and is instantly healed. Jesus rather than criticizing her unfeminine assertiveness or her violation of purity regulations says to her, “your faith has made you well.” She accepted responsibility for her own healing and Jesus blessed her.

Second story is of the Syro-Phoenician woman who came because her daughter was sick. Jesus rebukes the foreigner, not a child of Israel, and says, “It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs”. She, however, doesn’t give up and replies, “Even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.” She was bold, courageous, assertive, even stubborn, and she refused to accept her society’s judgment that neither she nor her

daughter were worthy of Jesus’ time or attention. Jesus grants her request as an equal.

Finally, there is the story of the unnamed woman who, like our other two women, stepped beyond the prescribed female boundaries when she entered another’s house, disrupted a meal for the male guests, and anointed Jesus for burial at Bethany just prior to Passover (Mark 14:3-9). She is, first of all, a prophet, for Jesus interpreted her action as prophetic: she anticipated his death and anointed his body beforehand for burial. She is the only one that understood his message of Messiahship as one of suffering and death.

So women, in Mark’s story, are the only ones who get it, but then it ends at the empty tomb with “for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.”

Fear seems to dominate our lives. Fear of gang violence, fear of economic collapse, fear of amalgamation. Some of it is irrational. Dan Gardner points out that, “in Canada, 26 people die in car crashes for every one life taken by a handgun. And if you are not a drug dealer of the friend of a drug dealer, and you don’t hang out in places patronized by drug dealers and their friends, your chance of being murdered with a handgun shrinks almost to invisibility.

But the odds of being born a woman are 50/50. So imagine guys, if you are not afraid—what would it be like to suddenly have something growing inside of you that gets bigger and bigger and then after nine months, the body water breaks, the blood flows, there is a lot of pain, you become empty again and there is new life. My God, talk about terrified...

But I now know a secret. A woman who has taught prenatal classes has confided to me that 90% of women who are preparing to give birth are terrified, they are

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worried that they will not be able to control their experience. Something is happening, and it is out of control, their body and what it is doing is beyond their control. And in the midst of the terror all they can do is pray to the creator of us all “let it be according to your will.”

Men, we got a problem. We want so much to be in control that we could never pray that prayer—let it be. Let it be—talk about terrified. I want to make it be, I don't want to let it be.

Today we celebrate the Lord's Supper. We will hear the story about how Jesus is made known to disciples in the breaking of bread. Now imagine what the words would mean if our Lord was a woman. A woman speaking to her newborn child and imagine you are that child. “This is my body, broken for you.” “This is my blood poured out for you.” In the brokenness and the emptiness, there is new life. In the flow of blood there is a new creation.

To come to the Lord's table, to see the emptiness of the tomb, to know the power of eternal life, is to become a child once again. It is to reaffirm our baptism faith that can dare to declare that there are, in the end, only three things that matter.

Faith, basic trust that we are loved. Hope, knowing that God is with us, in life, in death, in life beyond death. And Love, the power to create new life. That's all there is. Talk about terrifying...Who you gonna tell?

Mark 16:1-8

“When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. They had been saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?” When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, “Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. 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.”