**Where’s Jesus?**

**Text: Mark 16:1-8**

**Easter Sunday**

**April 1, 2018**

You feel so powerless! That’s what happens when someone close to you loses a loved one. You know you can’t stop the pain or bring back the one who’s passed on, but you know as well that you have to do *something*. So you send a card or bring a casserole or go to the funeral home.

That’s the way it was with the women who made their way to the tomb that morning. In the midst of their grief and their pain, they had to do something. So they bought spices with which to properly prepare Jesus body for burial; and at first light, they set out for the tomb.

They were focused on death. They were focused on their own grief. And as they drew closer to the tomb, they were focused on the very practical question of who would roll the stone away. They were focused on anything but…what they found: the stone had been rolled away! And in the tomb they found…not a dead body, but a very live angel. Mark, who is of course our storyteller, says, “They were alarmed.” Well, yeah; I guess so! But the angel – actually, the text simply says a young man dressed in a white robe, but presumably he was an angel – the angel said, “Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here…But go, tell his disciples…that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.”

Let’s pay careful attention to where Mark takes the story next; to how Mark *ends* the story. “So they…fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.”

That’s how this gospel ends. Now it’s *our* turn to be alarmed! Because we never actually see the Risen Lord. Some early Christians, who were equally alarmed, tacked on some alternative endings where we *do* see the Risen Christ. These alternative endings appear in our modern Bibles, but there’s good and ancient documentation for the notion that Mark didn’t write them. His gospel ends here, with Jesus nowhere in sight and the women running away terrified. There are no post-resurrection stories as we have in the other gospels. No Great Commission, no road to Emmaus, no sharing of meals, no walking through locked doors, no showing his hands and feet. No *wonder* endings were added!

In fact, most scholars agree that Mark ends in mid-sentence. A Disciples scholar, Eugene Boring, translates Mark’s final verse this way: “So they…fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them: and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid, and…”

Why would Mark end his gospel this way? Why end the story, in mid-sentence, with the word “and?” Maybe it’s an invitation to finish the story: an invitation to the women, and an invitation to us. To finish the story, we have to follow the Risen Christ to Galilee; we have to meet him in Galilee; we have to see him in Galilee.

Why Galilee? Well, for starters, Galilee is Jesus’ home turf. It’s where Jesus’ ministry began. It’s where most of his ministry occurred. Galilee is a place to which the disciples can circle back, and minister; this time with a new set of lenses. In fact, Galilee literally means *circle*.

The end of Mark is the beginning. And this time they have an opportunity to get it *right*! Galilee is where Jesus ministered and the disciples messed up. They tried to heal, and failed. They tried to understand who Jesus was, and failed. Jesus taught humility, and they debated who was the greatest. Jesus went off to pray in the early morning by himself, because the disciples couldn’t get it together and get up on time! But now they have the opportunity to go back home, to circle back to Galilee, and get it right. Galilee is a do-over. They failed to follow Jesus properly the first time, but this time they *will* follow the Risen Lord! This time they will speak openly of the Risen Lord. I think the reason that Mark’s Jesus so frequently told them to keep their mouths shut whenever he pulled-off a miracle was because he knew that they still didn’t understand who he was and whatever they might say, they’d get it wrong. He wasn’t just your run-of-the-mill miracle worker – of which there seems to have been many in Galilee – he was the harbinger of the Kingdom of God, with all of the good news and love and outreach to the marginalized and confrontation of the demonic that the Kingdom includes. The pre-Resurrection Jesus swore them to secrecy because he knew that they didn’t get it yet. Knowing their inclination to get it wrong, he didn’t want them to get the word out until they could see clearly and get it right. But now it was like these bumbling, near-sighted disciples had been given corrective lenses: *Easter* lenses, *Resurrection* lenses. Having the right lenses makes all the difference in the world. I was cleaning a mirror the other day and I kept adding more and more Windex but I still couldn’t get it clean. Then I took off my glasses – oh! – the mirror was clean; my *lenses* were dirty! If we get the right lenses, we can see clearly to do the work that Jesus is calling us to do. So the post-Resurrection Jesus goes before the no longer myopic disciples, back to Galilee, because now they can see clearly, and this time they *are* going to get it right. Now *they’re* going to preach the good news and confront the demonic and embrace the marginalized and engage in the humble servant ministry that Jesus modeled for them. They don’t literally see the Risen Lord, but they will *be* the Risen Lord. They will be the hands and feet of Jesus. They will be the Body of Christ!

Which is to say that Galilee is not only home turf, where they get a do-over; Galilee is also where the action is. Galilee is a crossroads, a commercial region, not a religious center like Jerusalem. People who came through and settled in Galilee came from all over the Roman Empire and from all cultures and walks of life. Jews were there, of course; but also Gentiles; *lots* of them. By leading the disciples back to Galilee, the Risen Lord was saying to these Jewish fisherman, “Don’t just stay among like-minded people in a place like Jerusalem; go to the multi-cultural crossroads of the Empire and preach the Gospel *there*, make disciples *there*, heal the sick *there*, cast out demons *there*, open your arms *there* to people who are despised and rejected and in need of the inclusive community that you can provide. The Risen Lord says, “Follow me to where the action is, and there you will be my hands and feet, there you will be the Body of Christ.”

Go home, to Galilee, where the action is, because Jesus is on the move. Well of course he is; this is *Mark’s* Jesus. The Risen Lord is on the move, just like Mark’s pre-Resurrection Jesus was. Jesus is no longer dead and in the tomb because he’s got better things to do! And if Jesus is on the move, than the disciples – his Body, the Church – had better be on the move too. In order to worship Jesus, we must follow him, and Jesus refuses to stay put. The Risen Christ has no intention of giving us time to sit around and ponder whether or not we believe in the Resurrection. In Mark’s Gospel, resurrection is understood not as a doctrine to believe but as a way of life to pursue; a way of life that follows Jesus—the Crucified and Risen One. Sometimes we Christians get stuck on a way of believing; as if I have to believe just the way you do, or you have to believe just the way you were taught in Sunday School. But Jesus is going ahead of us, and inviting us into a way of *doing*! Follow Jesus, and on our journey we will meet the Risen Christ. Be the hands and feet of the Risen One. Be the Body of Christ. And wherever that takes us, he will meet us there.

So where is Galilee for us? Where is the Risen Christ leading us? Well, I think Galilee is right outside our door. Galilee is right here in Bedford, which – like Galilee – is a more diverse community than one might think. We have well-off retired folk and younger families just barely getting by. We have healthy people in comfortable homes and homeless folk struggling with addictions. We have people filled with joy, and neighbors burdened by despair. We have folks who love blue grass, and others who love classical music. We have liberals and conservatives, Republicans and Democrats; libertarians and populists. And we have a Gospel that can speak to each and every one of them! We follow a Risen Lord who loves *all* of them! Here, in this place, we can create a community where there is a place for one and all. Church growth gurus have been telling us for decades that growing churches are homogenous churches where you have people who look, act and think alike. But the Risen Christ is telling us to follow him to Galilee, where you have all sorts of different kinds of people, and embrace them all! Proclaim the Christ to all! Welcome all!

In the short-term it’s easier to stick with people who are like us. It’s warm and comfortable and affirming. But our nation is already doing a pretty good job of encouraging people to be with and live with and listen to their own kind, and how well is that working? The Risen Christ invites the Church and the nation to take a *different* approach: reach out to someone who is *not* like you. Create a *diverse* community. Galilee is where we fling wide our doors and take the Easter party out into the community and say, “Hey, you all – *whoever* you are – Christ died and rose again for *you*!” That’s what it means to follow the Risen Lord to Galilee. That’s where Galilee is for us.

But not only there. Galilee can be *anywhere* that we follow Jesus into the life of service; *anywhere* that we follow Jesus into acts of compassion and confrontation and community; *anywhere* that we share the inclusive love of Christ; *anywhere* that we bring the Kingdom near.

Which is to say that Galilee is anywhere that we practice resurrection: leaving behind our fears and grief, and claiming a new way of living that *acknowledges* pain and suffering but does not allow it to *define* us.

“He has been raised, he is not here,” the angel said. “Follow him to Galilee,” the angel said. This is our invitation to leave death and grief behind, to quit our pity party, to go and meet Jesus, wherever he might be leading us. Wherever people are lonely, or lost, or suffering, or in need—that’s where Jesus is. That’s Galilee. That’s where we’re invited to meet him. That’s where we are called to be the Risen Christ; the Body of Christ; the hands and feet of Jesus.

Mark’s Jesus wants us to finish the story. He wants us to run away from the Tomb no longer filled with fear but overflowing with joy. We will see the Risen Lord when we go to Galilee, embrace Galilee, engage in the life of service in Galilee. We will see the Risen Lord when we circle back to the beginning and receive God’s gracious gift of a do-over. Jesus Christ is alive and we are alive! So look alive! Follow! Be the Risen Christ in all of the Galilees that he has placed before us.

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen!!