

# Raised

## Mark 16:1-8

In the imagination of most of us, the story of crucifixion and resurrection is a about our sin and God's redemption. Holy Week reenacted, in various ways, the drama of Christ's death at the hands of fallen humanity and God's gracious salvation of all. When it comes to the figure of the "sinner," we have several characters to identify with as we try to make this story our own.

There is Peter, the icon of faithfulness whose fear of exposure led him to lie. There is Judas, who sold his love for money. There are the Romans, who meet political challenge with violence, and there are the religious leaders whose desire to preserve tradition and power led them astray. Whichever one we identify with—they are all different versions of what Augustine called "prideful sinners"—those who, in order to protect themselves, turn their backs on God.

Mark gives us another view of things, another figure representing "fallen humanity:" "the women"—Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome. They crept through the night and arrived at the tomb just as the sun was rising over the hills. Imagine what they must have felt as they walked—their overwhelming grief, anger, and fear. Imagine the raw determination that must have driven them there—that time of day, that time in history, in that season of unrelenting violence.

To these women, Jesus' body still mattered, still had a claim on their hearts. His flesh, even in its decaying form, still signified him—his hands, his feet, torn as they were. To them, his body was irreplaceable, uniquely his, the one they loved.

Notice though, the followers who had proudly walked at the head of Jesus' pack were nowhere to be found. Peter was not there. Thomas was not there. The beloved disciple was not there. The Romans and the religious leaders were not there. They had left the scene of the story, having finished their work. The dream of God changing the world through Jesus was finished – they could disregard his instructions about being fishers of people, and his last instructions about serving one another or remembering his death as redemptive. The dreamer was dead and so was his dream. The only ones left in this trauma-rife grave space were those who in the course of daily life tended to the unseemly but necessary—cooking, cleaning, grieving, bearing and raising children, and perfuming bodies that held the stench of death. They were the custodians of crucifixion—the bearers of Easter.

Death, bodies, and grieving love were the realities that perch on the realms of life and faith, the spaces where so much of life unfolds—the hard work of loving, of being present, the grit that allows human life to keep going in the very moments that it encounters the reality of violence and the relentless march of death.

However, the relationship of these women to the bodily horror of what had happened was different. Everyone else in the story had washed their hands and gone home. The women, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome, however, never left. They watched as his body was placed in the tomb, and a day and a half later they went back to clean it up and make sure the hard work of life continued.

These women, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome, give us a different picture of the "fallen" and sinful humanity for whom God's grace came. What a different account of the "us" who are redeemed. According to Mark, it is not that they somehow get it right. Their relation to

the good news of resurrection is still complex and "sinful." The fact that they came to the tomb with oils tells that they did not really believe that he would be resurrected. Also, the angel told them to go and announce to the disciples that Jesus would meet them in Galilee, but instead, they ran away and said "nothing to anyone, for they were afraid." They are faithlessness by their silence and speechlessness. However before we pronounce judgment on those who abandoned Jesus and those who came at daybreak to anoint his body, remember we need to be honest that both of these are needed for an honest account of who we are as people of faith. We are always both the faithless abandoners and killers of God and the faithful mourners and lovers of God. **Serene Jones**

The words with which Mark ends—"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." These words express awe at what God has done in the life and death of Jesus. The women, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome, who came to the tomb expect to be paying their respected to their recently deceased teacher and friend by anointing his body. Yet none of the normal patterns of life and death held on that early morning. The tomb was open, and the women were greeted by a young man in a white robe. Of Jesus himself, they saw nothing, simply an empty tomb and the announcement that Jesus of Nazareth had been raised.

The announcement, "he has been raised," said something had happened to Jesus—the normal patterns of life and death had been disrupted by someone who can undo the power of death. That the women flee in "terror and amazement" indicated that they knew exactly the identity of the unnamed. Terror and amazement are words that describe one's response to a

revelation of God. It is God who raised Jesus; it is God who has altered the rules of the known world.

In the face of God's revelation, silence is a wholly appropriate response, because the women's silence created a space for the voice and presence of God to resound. What adequate words could the women have spoken in those first few moments as they left the tomb that would not have trivialized the moment that would not made the empty tomb into a story about what *they* had seen instead of being a moment about what *God* had done? The women's restraint allowed a moment of holy awe. Like the women, we stand hushed in awe at the cosmic power of God to take away death's sting.

**Gail R. O'day**

God is present not only in the loud hallelujahs and glorious proclamations of a grand, churchly Easter morning, forgiving prideful sinners. God persists as well in the midst of speechlessness, in death, in the outer regions of our own experiences and of our social lives, where life unfolds. Mark gives us a powerful account of God's good news by giving us these traumatized, determined women as witnesses to God's truth—it is not just pride or falsehood or arrogance or violent boasting that God redeems. It is also in the regions of life where we are broken by violence and by love and by the sheer exhaustion of the labor it takes to go on. Here, where we expect to find him dead, the tomb does not hold him. “He has been raised!”

Grace abounds! **Serene Jones**