

## **“Alarmed, Amazed, and Afraid”**

Rev. Ken McGarry at The First Church in Stoneham, Massachusetts

March 31, 2024 - Easter Sunday

[Isaiah 25:6-9; Mark 16:1-8](#)

Worried were Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of James, and Salome as they went to the tomb where Jesus' body had been laid. They had gone there at dawn on the Sunday morning after Jesus' crucifixion that Friday, so that they could anoint his body with embalming spices. As they went, still stunned and stricken with grief, they were worried that no one would be there and able to roll away for them the great stone sealing the entrance to the tomb.

Upon arriving there their worry was turned to alarm when they saw that the stone had already been rolled away and inside the tomb was not the body of Jesus, their teacher and friend, but a young man dressed in an angelic white robe, who delivered a divine word to the women for them not to be alarmed, for the one that they had been seeking, the one they saw be crucified with their own eyes, was no longer in the tomb, but had been risen, and they should go and tell Peter and the other disciples that they would all meet Jesus again, but in Galilee.

Going out of the tomb, they fled from the scene, stunned by amazement and terror. The final word of the Gospel According to Mark is that the stunned women left there and said nothing to the other disciples or anyone else for they were afraid.

The gospel, likely the first to be written, ends with Jesus' grieving and devoted friends being worried, alarmed, amazed, terrified, and afraid. Missing from the story are scenes of resurrected Jesus appearing to them and the others with comforting words; of Jesus displaying his wounds to dispel their disbelief; of them sharing meals together, thus restoring their fellowship and proving that he was resurrected in body; of Jesus commissioning them to go and make other disciples; and of Jesus' glorious ascension to the sky.

No. The story in Mark ends with the three devoted women running away from the tomb, terrified, amazed, and fearful.

Later writers attempted to “correct” this unsatisfying, abrupt ending by adding their own endings. Most of our Bibles include two such attempts, tacked on to the end of the gospel with the headings “The Shorter Ending of Mark” and “The Longer Ending of Mark.” And it is likely that the writers of both the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of Luke, both of which incorporate most of Mark, also attempted to “finish the story” and so “correct the record” with their own writings.

But I think that it is good for us to consider the Gospel of Mark today just as it is, without the Hollywood ending. And so we are left with the three followers of Jesus running away from the empty tomb and the good news that Jesus had risen, not rejoicing and excited to share the good news with friends, but fleeing silently, alarmed, amazed, and fearful.

I believe that those of us who hear and read this gospel are meant to recognize ourselves in these and the other followers of Jesus, who, from the gospel’s beginning to its ending, are alarmed and fearful, amazed and faithless, misunderstanding and bewildered -- just as we are! We can all identify with the fearful Marys and Salome as they ran from the empty tomb. And should all imagine ourselves in their place, ready to form the next chapters of this gospel story through our own living, even though we might be amazed beyond belief, alarmed at the state of the world, or afraid of doing something about it.

Having heard the report that Christ has risen, what will we do in this moment? Will we linger at lifeless tombs, disbelieving and searching still for life where life will never be found? Or will we go out from the tombs and go away from the places that keep us trapped in experiencing and re-experiencing suffering and loss? Will we be silently stunned when we witness the amazing miracles of God? Or will we share with joy the good news we witness of God’s resurrecting, transforming work in our lives? Will we remain fearful and broken by the dreadful brokenness of the world? Or will we have hope that God can take our violent, broken world and breathe new life into it?

Dear friends, on this Easter Sunday, let us recognize in the empty tomb a cause for celebration, for death and decay do not win and Christ’s way of living in love remains unconquered, and let us sing Hallelujah! Let us turn away from the tomb and go joyfully to gather others to journey with us to the better place Christ calls

us to, where we can go together to experience new miracles of resurrection life being created in us and all around us. Let us go and write new chapters of this gospel story, chapters full of hope for a better, more loving and life-filled world. What wonderful new stories shall we create today? Amen.