

## **Mark 16:1-8 Dawning Awareness [OR Knocked on Wood Recently?]**

**Pastor Caitlin Trussell with Augustana Lutheran Church on April 4, 2021 – Easter!**

You know that moment when things start to come together? A piece of evidence here, an observant comment there, now aligning with a random story you heard but can't remember where, all connect to gradually take shape – dawning awareness moving into the full light of day. The pandemic started out that way. A news story there, a parishioner's comment here, wondering about the latest rumor, and then BAM! – the governor locked down the state. There are millions of stories around the world and then each of us have our own million stories to tell. Mine include a small one about a Christmas cactus - a glorious, 20-year-old cascading beast that showed up at my door as a small sprout in the fundraising hands of a marching band kid.

The cactus moved into my church office a few years ago and had never done better. Native to the rain forest floor, he gets the long, dark nights in the office that are needed for the big winter bloom (yes, he's a "he," just roll with me on this). I lugged him home at the start of the pandemic. Lately it's dawned on me that he needs to move back to the office. His blooms were lovely this winter but sparse. Funny thing. I'm hesitant to bring him back. It feels like I might jinx the light at the end of the pandemic tunnel - which of course is absolutely ridiculous. At the same time, it feels pretty human. I'd guess that at least a few of us recently "knocked on wood" after saying something good in order to prevent back luck. Many of us don't really outgrow the magical thinking of our childhoods. We just learn how to hide it better. The truth is that we don't control nearly as much as we'd like to think, or as much as we wish we could. That's the essence of the Easter story.

Easter morning reveals a stone rolled back and an empty tomb. But before that happened, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome had followed Jesus on his ministry. They looked on from a distance and saw Jesus die on the cross.<sup>1</sup> They'd also watched as his body was placed in the tomb hewn out of rock.<sup>2</sup> Reality after reality had hit them head on. The women were under no illusions about the recent trauma. They were, however, having a difficult time getting their heads around what was happening tomb-side. We can imagine them packing up spices, feeling numb and exhausted, and walking to the tomb. Probably not speaking much except to wonder how they were going to get into the tomb to anoint Jesus. That's a heavy stone sealing it. The first one to get there stops, the second one stops, and then the third. Blinking to clear their eyes. Then staring so their minds catch up to what they're seeing. And then looking at each other to confirm the visual gradually taking shape in front of them in the light of dawn. The tomb is empty.

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<sup>1</sup> Mark 15:40-41

<sup>2</sup> Mark 15:47

Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome make their way into the tomb. Armed with spices and a plan to care for Jesus' body they instead were met by a young man, very much upright and talking, and very much not Jesus. He fast tracked the women into a new reality. They go from gentle dawning awareness of seeing the stone rolled back to terror and amazement as the young man dressed in white announces, "Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified, has been raised." New life has been unleashed and they have no idea what it means or what to do. Instead of telling Peter, as they'd been instructed by the young man, "...they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid." It's hard to blame them for being afraid. That's a lot to take in after the cruelty and trauma of Jesus' trial, torture, and execution. The women didn't yet know whether Jesus being raised was good news or not. Eventually, they must have figured it out because here we are, picking up the story where it leaves off, invited to do what the young man in white told the women to do – "Go and Tell."

"Go and tell." Here on Easter morning our story parallels the women's story. We started out talking about dawning awareness, Christmas cacti, and the women's story at the tomb. Uneventful, Eastery business so far. But the telling part? WE just fast tracked into a new reality that calls for saying something out loud. Yikes! Anyone feel angst about saying something out loud? Want to get away from the empty tomb with the women as far as your credit card will carry you? Let's take it down a notch then. The women regrouped at some point and so can we. We can say what we know. That's it.

Ernest Hemingway used to tell writers who were blocked to "write one true sentence; write the truest sentence that you know."<sup>3</sup> Similarly, as we interact with scripture and our own experience, we find the words or the situation that is the truest one that we know. For me, it was a few words in an obscure verse in a tiny book towards the end of the Bible. "God is love."<sup>4</sup> I hung onto those words like I was drowning. Because at that time, I kinda was. You may have chosen peace over pain and finally forgiven yourself as God's forgiveness took hold of you.<sup>5</sup> It may be that your self-pity has worn you out, and Jesus' command to love your neighbor as yourself unleashed you into the world to do some good.<sup>6</sup> Or it could be that the last year has exhausted you so thoroughly that you're at Easter worship hoping for something but you're not sure what that could even be.

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<sup>3</sup> Ernest Hemingway. <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/30849-all-you-have-to-do-is-write-one-true-sentence>

<sup>4</sup> 1 John 4:16b

<sup>5</sup> Ephesians 4:32

<sup>6</sup> Mark 12:33

Tell what you know. That's the starting point. In the weeks, months, and years after Jesus' birth, ministry, crucifixion, and resurrection, Jesus' followers told the story bit by bit, sharing it with each other and other people, and finally writing it down. Theirs was a process of faith in the same way ours is a process of faith. Shaky with doubt or trusting and celebratory, we seek to understand the promises of the cross and resurrection in our daily lives with a dawning awareness – a piece of evidence here, an observant comment there, now aligning with a random story you heard but can't remember where, finally an experience in your life that ties the pieces together to gradually take shape.

Like the women at the tomb, suffering and fear make it difficult to see the new life that God promises. New life often reveals itself way after the fact as we look back on our experiences. Trusting by faith in God's power to bring new life after trauma, over our own power to try and control, can be terrifying. BUT it can also be amazing. Easter invites us into dawning awareness along with the women at the empty tomb. New life isn't something we can jinx by talking about it or moving our plants around. We also can't wish new life were here when it's not here yet. We're just not that powerful. But watch what God can do.

p.s. It's definitely time for the Christmas Cactus to return to the office.