

Invited to Go, See, Tell

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Mark 16:1-8

Several weeks ago, I attended a conference in Chicago – Next Church, a positive, hopeful gathering of Presbyterians thinking about the future of the church. At the conclusion of that really good experience, three of us – three Presbyterian ministers – shared a cab from downtown back to O’Hare. We shoehorned into the backseat for a cozy 45 or 60 minute ride. Being a friendly lot, if not an evangelical lot, we began a conversation with the taxi driver. His name was David. What do you do, he asked us. We are all ministers. “Hallelujah,” he said. Not everyone responds that way. “Hallelujah.” So began a non-stop conversation all the way to the airport. David, we learned, had come from Nigeria for family reasons. He was married, with one son, also named David. He showed us a picture on his phone. We also learned that he was active in a Pentecostal church in a Chicago suburb. Church mattered to him; he knew his Bible. The talk turned to us. He did not know what Presbyterians were. You’re not alone, I thought. We explained as best we could that we would be considered “evangelical” in Nigeria, evangelical being any church that was not Roman Catholic. He asked us what we believe. That’s a great question, we said, which seemed like a very Presbyterian thing to say. The first thing we said that on 98% of things, we believe what you believe – about God, Jesus, the Bible. We explained that Presbyterians have a unique understanding that God is God of all the world, so we care for all the world. And we explained that the word itself, “Presbyterian,” meant that we elect members to leadership, and that on a bigger scale, that God gives gifts to everybody to serve, and not just some. Now mind you this was all happening as we were variously careening and crawling down the Kennedy to O’Hare. David had more questions. “Do you require a tithe?” “Require? No.” “You don’t require a tithe? Deuteronomy and Nehemiah say God requires a tithe,” he said, “but you don’t require it?” My friend Tom said, “We encourage it, but we don’t require it. In the Presbyterian Church, we meet you where you are and hope to help you grow in faith.” “You don’t require a tithe? Maybe I should become a Presbyterian,” he said. Maybe we should think about tithing, I thought. We arrived curbside. And the most remarkable thing happened. David popped the trunk, retrieved our bags, and we prepared to go our way. But before that could happen he asked us to pray – right then, right there. Pray. So we did, three white North American Presbyterian ministers and a Nigerian Pentecostal taxi driver, standing at a circle, praying at the airport. And if you looked closely, Jesus was there as well. He was already there. I do not know the impact on David but the impact on me will last long after the telling of this story this morning. Easter blessings to you, and Easter blessings to our broken and fearful world, seemed so intent on spinning apart, breaking apart, with conflict and heartache and human need. If you look closely, Jesus is already here, and there, the risen Christ. In the end, what we believe about this is very important; what we do with this will

matter even more so. We welcome you this joyous Easter morning. We welcome long time and recent members, out-of-town visitors and down the street guests, believers and seekers, welcome, all of you. This is an important day, *the* important day. Every moment flows into this day and every moment flows from this day. And however you approach this day, with a lifetime of belief, with a huge dose of skepticism, or somewhere in between – a place where most of us likely are, I believe – you are somehow searching for Jesus. Something about him, his life, his message, has brought you here, searching for Jesus. In that sense, you are like the three women at the tomb in Mark's gospel, searching, gone to find the body to prepare it. And in that sense as well, you will find Jesus, but not where and how you expect it. Searching for Jesus. The women go to the tomb, wondering who will roll the stone away. When they arrive, that job has been done already. They see a young man who tells them not to be alarmed. Right. "You are looking for Jesus. He was crucified. He is not here." And then begins a series of commands to the women, and, I believe, to us. "Look" – he is not there. Look. Then "go." Then "tell." Tell the disciples to go to Galilee. Then "see." There you will see him. Look. Go. Tell. See. And rather than doing those things, or at least doing those things right away, the women fled and didn't tell anyone, because they were afraid and amazed, but mostly afraid, as we would no doubt be. You noticed, if you were following along in your pew Bible, that the original story ended there. Scholars debate what happened next, and we won't debate that ending this morning, except to say that the original ended right there, as we did, with the women fleeing and not telling anyone. Searching for Jesus, them, and us, and the one person not present at the resurrection story was the resurrected one, Jesus himself. What is up with that?!?! Lance Pape writes that "After a long season of Lenten preparation we are ready to get a good hold on our resurrected Jesus and settle down for a bit, but Mark does not make him available for us...Jesus is not unavailable," Pape writes, "because his lifeless corpse is locked away behind a barrier; he is unavailable because the stone is removed and he is alive and away on other business!" Jesus is not present "because he has better things to do than wait around at a tomb. The 'young man dressed in a white robe' ...delivers the good tidings of Easter morning like an administrative assistant explaining why you can't have a quick word with the boss: 'You're looking for Jesus? Sorry, you just missed him.' You've missed him because he has moved on ahead to other pressing business." David Lose writes that even though there were later additions to the ending, the original ending was likely where Mark wanted the story to end, which is to say, really without an ending, or at least a conventional one that wrapped everything up neatly. And that was intentional, Lose writes. Why? "Maybe because he knew that no story about death and resurrection could possibly have a neat and tidy ending. Maybe because he knew that readers of his Gospel, if they were paying attention, ought to be more than a little uncomfortable at the idea of this convicted criminal coming back to life. Maybe because he believed that this story isn't over yet, and he writes an open ending to his gospel in order to invite us to jump in and take up our part in continuing it...Mark ends here, right here, inviting us the reader to pick up where these women left off and share the good news announced by the messenger at the empty tomb." Look, go, see, tell. Lose concludes: "The story of what God is doing in and through Jesus isn't over at the empty tomb...*It's only just getting started*. Resurrection isn't a conclusion, it's an invitation. And Jesus' triumph over death, sin, and hate isn't what Mark's Gospel is all about. Rather, Mark's Gospel is all about setting us up to live resurrection lives and continue the story of God's redemption of the world." Resurrection isn't a conclusion, it's a beginning. Resurrection isn't a conclusion, it's an invitation. "It's only the beginning,

and Mark is inviting us to get out of our seats and into the game, sharing the good news of Jesus' complete identification with those who suffering and his triumph over injustice and death with everyone we meet." Barbara Lundblad writes that "Of all the Easter Gospels, Mark's story invites us to stand where those first trembling witnesses stood. Those three women didn't see Jesus. Neither do we. They didn't hear Jesus call their names. Neither have we. They weren't invited to touch his wounded hands. We haven't touched Jesus' hands either. Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome are our silent sisters. The narrative is left for us, the readers, to complete." Joan Mitchell writes that "...the silence of the last disciple characters surviving in the narrative bring the readers and hearers to their own thresholds of faith, to the limit of words to speak the unspeakable ...the narrative still calls the disciples of the next generation to speak for themselves, and bring the gospel into dialogue with their lives." Look, go, see, tell. Lundblad says that "The silence at the end of Mark's gospel is always waiting to be filled in by people of every generation, waiting now for you and for me." ("Beyond Fear and Silence," *Huffington Post*, 04/04/2012) Waiting now for you and for me. This is not a conclusion, but an invitation, and since we have been so clearly commissioned to tell the story, how will we do it. With words? Perhaps. At Third Presbyterian Church, this year has been christened the "year of invitation." Invitation means inviting people to connect with us, to visit us, to experience us. And it also means we are invited to connect with this story itself at deeper levels, invitation that reaches out *and* invitation that reaches in. How will we tell the story, write its ending? With words? Perhaps. In fact, we have identified six words – spiritual, thoughtful, inclusive, compassionate, artistic, engaged – serving as prisms through which we might grasp resurrection, serving as stage directions to help us act out the drama of faith. So words, yes. But words only as they lead to action. Look at Mark's gospel. The resurrected Jesus is not too interested in hanging around to discuss all of this. He has moved on already, and we should pay attention to that invitation. Look. Go. See. Tell. This is a "show" and not "tell" resurrection story, and if our calling is to write the ending, then *we* are to "show" and not "tell." We do that as we are spiritual – connecting our spirits with God's. We do that as we are thoughtful – thinking the faith. We do that as we include those who have been excluded, deemed either by the church or the world as unworthy, love those who have been considered unlovable by others or themselves. We do that by being compassionate. We do that by becoming the artists we are to discover beauty all around us. And we do it by being engaged, in the fearful places, in the conflicted places, in the big places out there, Kenya, or France, or the Middle East, or our city, or in the intimate places in here, broken hearts, broken bodies, broken spirits, at a hospital bedside, with a searching college student, in a taxi cab heading to an airport. That is where we will find the resurrected Jesus, because that is where he already is – not in six words, or a million words, but in all the places where those words lead and in all the acts of faith where resurrection is already present. Resurrection is not a conclusion. It's a commencement, and an invitation, and as we pay attention to the rhythm of the story itself, we linger here for a moment, to be immersed in the majestic music, to soak in the beauty of the flowers, the windows, the wood and stone. We linger for a moment, and then get out of this place and go

find the resurrected Jesus where he already is, ahead of us, in the world he loves so much, with the people he cares for. Look, go, tell, see. That is our invitation. Christ is risen indeed. Now let us write the ending to the story. Amen.