

“Stirring Up Emotions”

Salado UMC, Salado, Tx 76571

Preaching Text: Mark 16:1-8

20 September 2020—16th Sunday after Pentecost

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“I use emotion for the many and reserve reason for the few” (—Adolph Hitler).

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Today’s text is Mark’s resurrection account and the resurrection appears in all our early creeds. The resurrection story makes us think. It also obliges us to feel our way into our faith. Often people’s stories stir us emotionally. Mark’s story surely does. But some stories also move us psychologically. A pastor friend tells a story from a church member—one that makes us reflect and emote! Like the resurrection, it is a story that causes us to re-evaluate our lives. The narrator begins: “I enjoy Saturday mornings. Maybe it’s the quiet that comes with being the first to rise, or maybe it’s the joy of not being at work. Whatever the reason, the first few hours of a Saturday morning are a delight.

Recently, I was going to my basement with a cup of coffee and the morning paper. This Saturday morning turned into a life lesson however. Let me tell you. I turned the dial up on my ham radio to listen to a Saturday program. As I did, I came across an older sounding chap. He had a terrific signal and sounded like he should be in the broadcasting business. He was telling a person about “a thousand marbles.” Intrigued, I listened.

“Well, Tom, it sounds like you’re busy with your job. I’m sure they pay you well but it’s a shame you have to be away from home and family so much. Hard to believe a young fellow should have to work seventy hours a week to make ends meet. Too bad you missed your daughter’s dance recital.”

He continued, “let me tell you something Tom, something that has helped me keep a good outlook on my own priorities.” That’s when he began to explain his theory of a “thousand marbles.” “You see, I sat down one day and did a little arithmetic. The average person lives about seventy-five years. I know, some live more and some live fewer, but on average, folks live about seventy-five years.” “Then, I multiplied 75 times 52 and I came up with 3900, the number of Saturdays that the average person has in his/her lifetime. Now stick with me Tom, I’m getting to the important part.”

“It took me until I was fifty-five years old to think about all this in any detail,” he went on, “and by that time I had lived through over twenty-eight hundred Saturdays. I got to thinking that if I lived to be seventy-five, I only had about a thousand of them left to enjoy.” “So, I went to a toy store and bought every single marble they had. I ended up visiting three toy stores to round-up 1000 marbles. I took them home and put them inside of a large, clear plastic container. Every Saturday since then, I have taken one marble out and thrown it away.”

“I found that by watching the marbles diminish, I focused more on the really important things in life. There is nothing like watching your time here run out to help get your priorities straight.” “Now let me tell you one last thing before I sign-off and take my bride out for breakfast. This morning, I took the last marble out of the container. If I make an extra Saturday, then God has given me extra time. One thing we can all use is a little more time.” “It was nice to meet you Tom, I hope you spend more time with your family, and I’m signing off.”

It was eerily silent on the band when this fellow signed off. He gave us all a lot to think about. I had planned to work on my antenna that morning, and then I was going to meet up with a few hams to work on the next club newsletter. In its place, I went upstairs and woke my wife up with a kiss. “C’mon honey, I’m taking you and the kids to breakfast.” “What brought this on?” she asked. “Oh, it’s just been a long time since we spent a Saturday together with the kids. Hey, can we stop at a toy store while we’re out? I need to buy some marbles.” Hear the day’s lesson from Mark:

16 When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they could go and anoint Jesus’ dead body. 2 Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they came to the tomb. 3 They were saying to each other, “Who’s going to roll the stone away from the entrance for us?” 4 When they looked up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away. (And it was a very large stone!) 5 Going into the tomb, they saw a young man in a white robe seated on the right side; and they were startled. 6 But he said to them, “Don’t be alarmed! You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised. He isn’t here. Look, here’s the place where they laid him. 7 Go, tell his disciples, especially Peter, that he is going ahead of you into Galilee. You will see him there, just as he told you.” 8 Overcome with terror and dread, they fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid [Mark 16:1-8, CEB].

Mark’s Gospel, notably the story of the resurrection, gives us an emotional pause. Mark reminds us that God put us here on earth to love others and them to love us. God offers us another chance by the resurrection’s power. Last week’s lesson ended with Jesus’ statement: “Look, here comes my betrayer” (14:42). Judas betrays Jesus with a kiss. The established order then brings Jesus to the Sanhedrin, a court made up of religious authorities who rule Jewish Palestine. Jesus stands before the Council and the High Priest. They blindfold, beat, and ridicule Jesus. In due course, even the leader of the twelve, Peter, denies Jesus as Jesus earlier prophesied (14:30). After Mark offers a lengthy sketch about Peter’s failure of nerve Mark similarly attends to the “fidelity failure” of all the disciples.

Mark routinely tells stories in a brisk style. But this part of the story has such rich detail because it reveals Mark’s nonstop discontent with the disciples. They undeniably came up far short of their real-life performance compared with their oath of steadfastness that we see in chapter 14. While Peter conceals his relationship with Jesus to strangers in the courtyard, the Jewish authorities both question and bedevil Jesus—an all-night affair.

As morning breaks, the Jewish religious establishment delivers Jesus to the secular authorities. Pilate represents Rome here as governor and sanctioned Palestinian political overseer. He questions Jesus. But Jesus says little. Jesus’ lack of a defense amazed the governor and he marveled (15:5).

Pilate instructs his soldiers to prepare Jesus for crucifying. All the while the soldiers and onlookers mock Jesus on his way to “Golgotha, which means Skull Place” (15:22). The Romans press a man named Simon, from Cyrene in North Africa, into lugging Jesus’ cross to Golgotha. Jesus, at this point of his ordeal, is, it would seem, too weak to carry his own cross.

Mark’s next leg in the story telling occurs at Golgotha. All four Gospels allude to the casting of lots for Jesus’ clothing. It is unusual for all four Gospels to be in full agreement on such a detail. We can account for this accord, no doubt, because of Psalm 22:18: “They divvy up my garments among themselves; they cast lots for my clothes.” Thus, all our Gospel writers think this is in some way an achievement of

prophecy. In the fourth of Jesus' "Seven Last Words" (see *Book of Worship*, p. 365), Jesus quotes Psalm 22: "My God, my God, why have you left me?"

When Jesus dies (15:37) two remarkable things happen. First, the temple curtain "is torn from top to bottom." Like the figure of the fig tree in Mark (11:12ff.; 13:28), the ripping of the curtain means for this Gospel writer that it is "curtains" for the temple. We also observe here an allusion to Jesus' baptism. "While he was coming up out of the water, Jesus saw heaven splitting open and the Spirit, like a dove, coming down on him" (1:10).

Second, as Jesus dies, a Gentile and Roman centurion confesses, "This man was certainly God's Son" (15:39). The centurion is clearly an outsider. He is likely an Italian and a gentile. Yet, he is the only individual in Mark's entire Gospel to recognize who Jesus in fact really is. Perhaps, in watching Jesus die, the centurion sees what the twelve disciples longed to see and missed. God crowns the king of glory on the throne of a cross.

While it might be easy to hold out the hope that the women at the tomb would end up as heroic, Mark speedily quashes that dreamy notion. In verse seven of chapter 16, the angel/young man gives implicit directions to those who come to anoint Jesus: "Go, tell his disciples . . ."

Now comes the Marcan bombshell. "Overcome with terror and dread, they fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid." This Gospel, from start to finish, never lets people off the hook. We thought to the very end the women would "get it right." They did not. They too made a run for it. Some may suggest their reaction entails holy awe. Given Mark's attitude toward "wannabe" disciples, the woman's reaction was most likely exactly what Mark suggests: sheer terror.

At Mark 8:18 we read Jesus asking the twelve, probably in weariness: "Don't you have eyes? Why can't you see? Don't you have ears? Why can't you hear? Don't you remember?"

These too are questions that Mark's Jesus asks us 2000+ years later.

David Neil Mosser, Salado UMC, Salado, TX 76571