

Easter: THE STORY CONTINUES!

Mark 16:1-8 [MW21-12]

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton at Mangawhai and Wellsford, Sunday 04 April 2021

What is Easter all about?

- what does it mean?
what does it mean for you?
what does it mean for me?
- what does it mean for all those who are not here
not in any gathering, not part of any church this morning?

Let me answer simply and briefly by reading the title, the theme of this sermon:

- "the story continues"
that's it in a nut shell, or maybe an egg shell: the story continues!
- and let me give this continuing story flesh and bones and life
so that we can relate it to ourselves
as I tell you about one of those intimately and integrally involved with the story
- this person discovered the joy and the heart and the new hope of Easter
very, very personally
- my hope is that you do too as you follow this person
discovering the story continues
with the 'gospel of the second chance'

Just before we embark on this continuing story

- I need to give credit to writer and pastor Max Lucado
whose writing about this person is the basis of what I'm going to share this morning

So, just who is this person ...

Here's what Mark records in his gospel:

Jesus said to his disciples, "All of you will reject me, as the Scriptures say, 'I will strike down the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.' But after I am raised to life, I will go ahead of you to Galilee." Peter spoke up, "Even if all the others reject you, I never will!" Jesus replied, "This very night before a rooster crows twice, you will say three times that you don't know me." But Peter was so sure of himself that he said, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never say that I don't know you!"

Jesus was led off to the high priest. Then the chief priests, the nation's leaders, and the teachers of the Law of Moses all met together. Peter had followed at a distance. And when he reached the courtyard of the high priest's house, he sat down with the guards to warm himself beside a fire.

Not too close, yet not too far. Near enough to see him, but not near enough to be seen with him. Love made Peter ashamed to run; fear made him ashamed to draw near. The disciples chose the left side of the road and ran. Jesus chose the right side of the road and obeyed. But Peter chose the yellow stripe down the middle. BIG mistake. He would have been better off in the shadows with the disciples. He would have been better off in the courtyard with his master. But instead Peter is warming his hands on the devil's hearth. A young girl recognizes him and asks, "Aren't you one of that man's followers?" "No, I am not!" he defies. Moments later he is asked the question again: "Aren't you one of the man's followers?" And a second time he denies his Lord. Then a third question comes: "Didn't I see you with him in the garden?" This time Peter curses the very thought of it.

Luke adds a chilling phrase to his account of Peter's denial of Christ. When the cock crowed, "the Lord turned and looked straight at Peter". The rooster reminds Peter of Jesus' warning. Peter lifts his eyes and looks across the courtyard, only to find Jesus looking at him. Jesus is being assailed by accusations, but he doesn't hear them. He hears only the denial of his friend.

If Peter ever thought he could keep his fall a secret, he now knows he can't.

Mark tells us:

Then Peter remembered that Jesus had said to him, "Before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times." And he broke down and wept.

But you know what?

- the story doesn't end there!

You see there are two fires in Peter's story

- the first is the fire of denial, but the second is the fire of discovery
the first fire was built by men; the second was built by Christ
- at the first fire, Peter denied Jesus
at the second, Peter confessed him

What took Peter from one fire to the next?

- how did he journey from the fire of denial to the fire of discovery?
in between the fires are two events: the tears of Peter and the cross of Jesus
both are essential
- if Peter had shed tears but not seen the cross, he would have known only despair
had he seen the cross but shed no tears, he would have known only arrogance
but since he saw both, he knew redemption
- he knew that the story continues
and this is how I know that the story continues

It was like discovering a gift in a packet of cornflakes or spotting a little pearl in a box of buttons or stumbling across a ten dollar note in a drawer full of envelopes. It was small enough to overlook. Only two words. I know I'd read that passage a hundred times. But I'd never seen it. Maybe I'd passed over it in the excitement of the resurrection. Or, since Mark's account of the resurrection is by far the briefest of the four, maybe I'd just not paid too much attention. Or, maybe since it's in the last chapter of the gospel, my weary eyes had always read too quickly to note this little phrase.

But I won't miss it again. And neither will you. In fact you might want to highlight it in yellow and underline it in red. Think back to our Gospel reading from Mark, chapter 16. There are those first five verses about the women's surprise when they find the stone moved to the side. Then feast on that beautiful phrase spoken by the angel, "He is not here, he is risen," but don't pause for too long. Go a bit further. Get your highlighter ready and enjoy this jewel in the seventh verse (here it comes).

The verse reads like this: *Now go and tell his disciples, and especially Peter, that he will go ahead of you to Galilee.* Did you hear it? Let me read it again. *Now go and tell his disciples, and especially Peter, that he will go ahead of you to Galilee.*

Now tell me if that's not a hidden treasure. If I might paraphrase the words, "Don't stay here, go tell the disciples," a pause, then a smile, "and in particular make sure to tell Peter, that he is going before you to Galilee."

What a line. It's as if all of heaven had watched Peter fall - and it's as if all of heaven wanted to help him back up again. "Be sure and tell Peter that he's not left out. Tell him that one failure doesn't make a flop."

Whew!

No wonder they call it the gospel of the second chance. Not many second chances exist in the world today. Just ask the kid who didn't make the first eleven or the first fifteen; the fellow who got told to clear out his desk; or the mother of three who got dumped for a "pretty little thing."

Not many second chances. Nowadays it's more like, "It's now or never." "Around here we don't tolerate incompetence." "Not much room at the top." "Three strikes and you're out." "It's a dog-eat-dog world!"

Jesus has a simple answer to our masochistic mania. "It's a dog-eat dog world?" he would say "Then don't live with the dogs." That makes sense doesn't it? Why let a bunch of other failures tell you how much of a failure you are?

Sure you can have a second chance.

Just ask Peter. One minute he felt lower than a snake's belly and the next minute he was the high hog at the trough. Even the angels wanted this distraught fisherman to know that it wasn't over. The message came loud and clear from the celestial Throne Room through the divine courier. "Be sure and tell Peter that he gets to bat again."

Those who know these types of things say that the Gospel of Mark is really the transcribed notes and dictated thoughts of Peter. If this is true, then it was Peter himself who included these two words! And if these really are his words, I can't help but imagine that the old fisherman had to brush away a tear and swallow a lump when he got to this point in the story.

It's not every day that you get a second chance. Peter must have known that. The next time he saw Jesus, he got so excited that he barely got his britches on before he jumped into the cold water of the Sea of Galilee. It was also enough, so they say, to cause this backwoods Galilean to carry the gospel of the second chance all the way to Rome where they killed him. If you've ever wondered what would cause a man to be willing to be crucified upside down, maybe now you know.

It's not every day that you find someone who will give you a second chance - much less someone who will give you a second chance every day.

But in Jesus, Peter found both.

And so the story continues

- for Peter
- for all those who are not here
- for those not in any gathering, not part of any church this morning
- for me
- and for you

Praise God for Easter and the Gospel of the Second Chance!

- He is Risen!
- He is Risen indeed!!!