

Keep Going
by Durrell Watkins
Mark 16.1-8
Sunshine Cathedral, Easter Sunday 2009 (Easter Sermon)

About 12 years ago, a medical miracle presented itself to people living HIV and AIDS. Combination drug therapies were introduced, and they proved effective for a lot of people. After a decade of enormous loss and grief and fear, where lovers and friends and neighbors and colleagues were ripped from our lives far too soon by a virus that took far too many, finally very real hope emerged.

And now there are people who have been living with HIV for decades, and they have every reason to hope for decades more of abundant living.

Of course, the medicines are expensive and there are side effects and there is more work to be done, and we continue to hope for a cure and until there is a cure we don't want anyone else to become HIV infected.

But just knowing that there were treatments that would benefit a great many of us was cause for celebration and relief.

Well since those combination therapies arrived, another decade has passed. During that time, our country was attacked by terrorists.

And a new wave of fear and grief seemed to wash over us...and just as AIDS sparked a renewal of homophobia, those attacks sparked a renewal of racism and certain forms of religious intolerance.

Following those difficult days, the drum beat of war began to sound...and for years now, the war has continued.

While we're still remembering the pain of AIDS, and the fear of 9/11, and the cost of war, the global economy starts to break down.

Of course there are plenty of fingers to point and lots of blame to go around, but while the pundits try to figure out whose fault it is and others try to find a way to lead us to a healthier experience, once again we have known hardship; we've seen loved ones lose jobs, homes, confidence, savings and retirement funds and another wave of fear, regret and sorrow washes over us.

Added to all of this there is the renewed homophobia that has been unleashed as a few states have offered marriage equality to all consensual, adult couples.

And as we fight to make true our pledge to a republic that is ONE nation with liberty and justice for ALL, the exhaustion grows.

AIDS, homophobia, terrorism, racism, nationalism, war, recession, more homophobia...will we dare to name that some of us are just tired? Worn down.

Exhausted. Maybe even a little depressed. This would be a really good time to hear some good news.

Mark offers us a story today. He is writing about the execution of Jesus and the days that follow.

It was a difficult time. Not unusual, really.

Crucifixion was horrific but also frequently employed to terrorize the conquered people of the Empire and to keep them in line.

Jesus' friends and followers may have known others who had been crucified, and even if they didn't know them they had seen them on the road side hanging from those despicable crosses.

We tend to glamorize or romanticize or even ignore the horror of the cross, but the people living through those difficult days were living with the anxiety that a world where crucifixion is a norm must produce.

Mark is writing 40 years after Jesus' brutal execution, and there have been more difficulties in those 4 decades. The peasants continue to live in poverty, the Jesus Movement continues to be viewed with skepticism by both the religious and political establishments, and in the year 70 when Mark is probably writing his gospel, the Temple and the holy City are destroyed by the imperial army.

One thing after another has taken place; one crisis has followed another. Mark's community is tired, and they need good news. Sound familiar?

And so we read from the last chapter of Mark's gospel today. Many scholars believe verse 8 is where the gospel originally ended and that later verses were added by editors after Mark.

But in that passage we heard today we see three women who aren't really expecting a miracle. They are going to a cemetery to visit a dead body. They aren't going to witness a miracle; they are going to process their grief.

And once they get to the tomb of Jesus, they are in for a shock. They see a young man in a robe (perhaps the young man who had run out of a robe in the garden when Jesus was arrested in chapter 14). And the young man who is also visiting the grave tells them the body is gone.

Can you imagine...your friend has been arrested, interrogated, tried, found guilty, tortured, and executed, and now you can't even visit the body because it's missing? Can you imagine the panic, the fear, the outrage you would feel in that desperate moment?

But the young man has a piece of information that they don't have yet, and he shares it with them. He says, "Do not be alarmed...Jesus has been raised...tell his disciples that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him." And they ran away...for they were afraid, which is a reasonable response.

But here is actually where the good news can be found: He is going ahead of you...there you will see him.

The women didn't see Jesus at the grave.

They didn't see a resuscitated body.

They didn't hear angel choirs or hear a voice speaking from the heavens.

They saw a stranger and an empty grave. They were panicked and filled with fear and anxiety.

But as uncertain, as crazy, as difficult as the moment seemed, there was this message...hope is ahead of you...relief is ahead of you...good news is ahead of you...healing is ahead of you...empowerment is ahead of you...it may not be here, but it exists and you will find it...its ahead of you...you'll find it as you move forward.

Mark's resurrection story this morning is the story of moving forward. It's the story of not giving up.

There are lots of questions and not many answers.

There is frustration and danger and disappointment.

But keep going forward...don't give up, don't give in, don't stop...keeping moving in a positive direction...You'll find what you're looking for just ahead, so keep going.

In Mark's story today, the power of resurrection is the power to keep going. The Empire killed Jesus, but somehow, his message, his spirit, his very life...kept going. And the community hearing this story is called also to keep going.

In the middle of chaos, in the middle of exhaustion, Mark offers the promise of Resurrection...it's happened, and you'll experience it...if not now, then down the road...so don't give up...keep moving, keep going, keep hoping, keep on daring to believe that it can get better.

Your miracle is still ahead of you. You won't miss it if you'll just keep going.

This is the Good News. Amen.

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Affirmations:

There is a miracle for me!

I'll keep going forward.

I won't give up until I find it.

The spirit of Life is blessing me now.

I am being renewed.

And so it is!

Final Word:

“When you call upon the love of God and exercise pure intent, there will be miracles.”

Kryon