

**Easter 2018**

**Mark 16.1-8**

**Sunday, April 1, 2018**

A searing image from the recent *March for Our Lives* rally in Washington, D.C., was that of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School student, Emma González. She addressed the crowd briefly, and then she stood silent for six minutes and twenty seconds: the time it took Nikolas Cruz to commit the massacre at her high school. Emma's emotions were evident, as a few tears trickled down her face. Yet, the silence itself may have been the most moving part of her speech.

Indeed, the silence was so powerful, many did not know what to do. Think of it: 800,000 individuals gathered in D.C. to rally, cheer on speakers who inspired and challenged, and ensure that the world would hear their feelings. Then, into the midst of the buzz, Emma goes silent. Initially, people respond and honor the moment in silence as well. It's the natural thing to do. Yet, sooner than later, it is clear that many do not know what to do, how to handle the silence. Some cheer encouragement for Emma. Others begin a chant. Still others shout out slogans from the march. The silence is overwhelming. It needs to be filled with *something*. Anything.

For those who attended the Good Friday service, these words may sound familiar. In fact, they are the verbatim start to that sermon. So, why use Good Friday material on Easter Sunday? Well, for one thing, the two days are inextricably linked. They are mysteriously parts of a whole that express the fullness of God's involvement with this world, our lives, and the whole creation. Indeed, both realities are meaningless without the other.

Furthermore, in case you missed it, our gospel text seems to leave us, if not in the dark, then at least in silence. Indeed, that is precisely where Mark's resurrection narrative ends: in silence. "So they--the women--went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid." For all our marketers out there, probably *not* the best way to sell the resurrection!

According to Mark's gospel--the first among the four gospels--there was no angel chorus, no encounter with the risen Jesus, no Alleluias! According to Mark's gospel, there is only silence and fear. And the people in the *March for Our Lives* were not the first to be uncomfortable with silence. Later monks who copied the biblical texts were so uncomfortable with this silent ending to Mark's gospel that they, you

guessed it, tacked on an ending. Not just one ending but two. A short and a long ending neatly tying up the loose ends of the original, pushing silence and fear aside, and confirming beyond the shadow of a doubt that the resurrection really happened. These monks would have made any marketer proud.

However, the problem with the best intentions of these monks in their unease over the silence of Mark’s resurrection scene is that they fail to acknowledge where we live much of our lives: in silence and within many shadows of doubts. Their desire to “fix” the narrative betrays a tendency that we all have to try to get rid of loose ends, the fragmented reality of life.

Certainly, the events that led up to the *March for Our Lives* underscore this reality. And the myriad personal issues that we deal with from loss of spouse to loss of health to uncertainty and concern for loved ones raise the specter of our place in the shadows and silence. Unfortunately, many take the resurrection story to mean that all the problems of the world are supposed to melt away. The resurrection, however, is not meant to be the end to all problems and difficulties and suffering. Resurrection, as one author notes, is not a conclusion, it’s an invitation. An invitation to life, yet life in its fullness, and life as it is, not as we

wish it were. Indeed, at times, those places of silence and unknowing are far from dangerous or desolate; these places can offer glimpses of wisdom.

Which is the beauty of Mark's resurrection account, the original ending that is. Many theories exist as to why he left things in silence and fear. On the one hand, the story that he tells--the brutal crucifixion at the hands of the Romans and the miraculous and mysterious resurrection--could not possibly have an orderly ending. And, even more interesting, an open-ended ending is, well, open-ended--one NOT tied up in a bow--that invites us all to enter the narrative and take up our part in continuing it. As David Lose notes:

Resurrection is only the beginning; this story isn't over. It's only the beginning, and we have a part to play. It's only the beginning, and if you wonder why there is still so much distress and pain in the world, it's because God's not done yet. It's only the beginning, and Mark is inviting us to get out of our seats and into the game. . . It's only the beginning, and we're empowered and equipped to work for the good in all situations because we trust God's promises that all will in time come to a good end, even when we can't see evidence of that.

Resurrection is not the end. Rather resurrection is the invitation to the mystery of being, with all its wonder and fear and hope and pain and peace and struggle and. . . silence. The silence of the end of Mark's gospel makes room for us and welcomes us to participate in the narrative that God continues to write with the world, as it bends to a fuller and richer expression of love and mercy and justice embodied by us. Thus, this silence echoes down through the centuries and allows for those moments of insight and compassion, where we as a species advance. This silence echoes down through the centuries and allows the *March for Our Lives* youth to enter the narrative with amazing passion and eloquence of living in safety, without fear, and free from violence. This silence echoes down through the centuries, and invites you to write your piece in the narrative. What is it? What is your part?

### *Silence*

The end of this sermon also echoes Good Friday:

Emma Gonzalez finished her six minutes and twenty seconds of silence, by referring to what the silence stood for: the time it took Nikolas Cruz to commit the massacre at her high school. She then concluded, "Fight for your lives before it is someone else's job." While Emma's

exhortation rings true in this moment, the paradox of our Good Friday combined now with our Easter silence is that we trust that we no longer must ultimately fight for our lives, for someone has already made it his job. And this promise allows us to engage fully with the life God gives us, desires for us, and invites us to partner with God in making all things whole. Remember, Resurrection is only the beginning.