

Good Power 7: The Power to Live  
Mark 16:1-8  
April 4, 2021  
Easter  
North UMC

In November, the National Bureau of Economic Research published a working paper entitled, “Why Is All Covid-19 News Bad News?” Economists Bruce Sacerdote and Ranjan Sehgal of Dartmouth and Molly Cook of Brown University wrote the paper based on their analysis of news coverage about the pandemic. They created a database of print and television news coverage that used an algorithm to classify the language in the articles and reports as positive, neutral or negative.

What they discovered is that national U.S. media was more negative than all other sources. Of the language used in reporting,

- 87 percent in national coverage;
- 53 percent in domestic regional coverage;
- 51 percent of the international media, and
- 64 percent in scientific journals

was negative. The negativity transcended the ideological spectrum—MSNBC and Fox News were equally negative.

Their findings parallel what researchers have noticed in social media. Stories with the most negative language are shared and read on Facebook more than positive and neutral language stories. As Sacerdote said, “Human beings, particularly consumers of major media, like negativity in their stories.”

Just think what the headline in “The New York Times” or on Fox News would be for that first Easter: “Jerusalem Cemetery Vandalized.”

In spite of all the bad news, this is the Good News today: Christ is risen! Mark began his Gospel with these words: “The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ,” and he ends with the story of that good news — Jesus has been raised from the dead.

But when you compare Mark with the other Gospels—Good Newses—he sounds like he buried the lead. In comparison, Mark is not flashy about this good news. Matthew is. There’s an earthquake in Matthew’s version of the resurrection, and the angel is dressed in lightening. Luke has two angels decked out in dazzling clothes and then that evening Jesus himself shows up on the road to Emmaus. Jesus is right there in the garden that morning with Mary in John’s Gospel, and by that evening he is walking through locked doors in the upper room. Mark has none of that. No earthquakes, no Jesus in the garden. The angel, described as simply a ‘young man,’ is only wearing a white robe. Mark’s resurrection is the Costco of Easter stories.

If Mark’s version feels incomplete, then it is. Did you notice in your Bible that the rest of the chapter after verse eight is in brackets, a short version and a long version? That’s because different ancient manuscripts have different endings. In the oldest manuscripts, the last verse eight actually ends with the word ‘for’—‘for’ what? This Gospel, this ‘Good News,’ ends with an incomplete sentence. What kind of good news is that?

If nothing else, it's realistic. Come Monday morning our lives will most likely pick up where we left off, filled with the negative words of the news cycle. On Sunday, we shout "Christ is risen, indeed!" But on Monday we are laid low by more bad news, more deaths, more fears, more injustices, more of the same.

Or so it seems.

The Good News of Easter depends on where you look for it. The messenger told them, "He has been raised; he is not here....he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him." Mark does not describe the risen Jesus appearing in the cemetery because that is not where the risen Christ is. Mark ends on an incomplete sentence because the real resurrection, the actual good news, is not at the empty tomb but in the presence of the risen Christ filling our lives.

The Good News of Easter is the power of life we receive through the risen Messiah. Jesus's resurrection is God's power of life.

The resurrection of Jesus is God's gift of renewing life right now. It is the power of life that overcomes the forces of death. It is God's power to give us new life when the forces of sin and evil, injustice and oppression have killed our minds and souls and relationship. His resurrection is the jump start to our battery to enable to start living again.

More so, the resurrection of Christ is the power of everlasting life. Because Christ was raised from the dead, we have everlasting life in his Spirit. His resurrection is the electrical generator for every person's eternal life.

The Good News of Easter when it is stripped down to its bare meaning is God's gift of new and eternal life. No frills, no earthquakes or dazzling appearances. It is the power to live everyday as a gift, and when we die to live into that powerful gift for eternity.

"He has been raised; he is not here" at an empty tomb in a graveyard. The messenger commanded the women not to stay there because God's power to live is not in an empty tomb. We cannot stay in the empty tombs of despair. The news cycle keeps us in the tomb and we are tempted to let all those negative words and images become the final word on our lives. We cannot stay in the graveyards of doubt. We bury our faith with six feet of doubt shoveled by rationalism that demands we make scientific sense of what happened that first Easter morning, or bulldozed over by literalism that demands we abandon our modern questions about the first Easter. Leave the rationalism and literalism in the tomb and go looking for the risen Christ elsewhere.

"He is going ahead of you;" the messenger points us in the right direction. The risen Christ is going ahead of us this week and this year with the power to live. It is not up to us to make this a reality, nor is resurrection something that just happens in nature like the changing seasons. It is a gift that disrupts death. God's power to live is a gift that is already out there waiting for us because Christ leads the way toward a better life, a hopeful future for you. Mark's Gospel ends on an incomplete sentence because God is completing that sentence in our stories today. The Good News of resurrection is the exclamation point in our lives.

"He will meet you in Galilee," revealed the messenger about where to look. We discover the resurrection in our everyday, ordinary lives, our "Galilees." It is in the common and overlooked routines

and experiences that we meet the risen Christ, because that is where we need the power to live. We need the risen Christ infusing our everyday lives with resurrection power. This morning the best Good News is that the resurrection happens for us in our daily lives.

You begin to see this in a closer reading of Mark. Why did it end with a lackluster Easter story and an incomplete sentence? Because Mark had already been talking about the resurrection throughout the entire Gospel in subtle, little ways. Time and again, when Mark describes the healing of a paralytic or the teaching of a new truth or a vision on a mountain top, Mark uses Greek words to describe the resurrection. In all those demonstrations of power by Jesus earlier in the story, we see the resurrection power of life. It is like reading an Agatha Christie novel, and it's only at the end when the true culprit is revealed that you can go back and see all the clues. We do not see God's resurrection power only at the end of our lives, in our tombs. Jesus is the culprit of the power to give life throughout his life, and in turn he gives life throughout our lives.

We do not see God's power for living only in the Jerusalems of our day. Jerusalem was the capital, the center of power, the place to be somebody important. The risen Christ will not be seen there, but back in Galilee, their hometown, the backwater of the Empire. The resurrection life is not in the rich and powerful centers of society, not for the VIPs of this world, but it is found in the overlooked and underrated, the rejected and written-off people and places of this world.

"There you will see him." That is the challenge for us. We must look for the risen Christ in our ordinary and overlooked parts of our lives. We look with the eyes of faith for signs of the resurrection. Wherever we see lives being saved from hunger and poverty we see the risen Christ. Whenever we see opportunities for a person to have a new start in their relationships we see the risen Christ. Whenever we see persons finding healing from addiction and freedom from abuse we see the risen Christ. Wherever we see peace triumphing over war, kindness over meanness, equality over prejudice, justice over evil, there we see the risen Christ. Whenever we see someone turn away from death and despair and finding hope for one more day, there we see the presence of the risen Christ offering the power to live to that person.

You will see him, the risen Christ, in your ordinary days and overlooked moments, and there you will find God's power of new life that lasts forever. It may not be dramatic and extraordinary. No earthquakes or angels with bling. But in those small moments, he appears. In those moments when you are at the end of your rope, he will be there to give you the strength and hope for the next day.

Even on a subway platform we see God's power to live. Years ago, New York City had a project to bring the arts to the subways by paying musicians and artists to perform in the subway system for people passing by. The Zane Massey Ensemble, a jazz group, was part of that project. One day, as they were performing and had their hat out for tips on the floor in front of them, someone dropped a bill with a note attached. The note read, "Earlier today I was thinking about committing suicide, but hearing your music made me change my mind." The risen Christ is in our everyday lives offering us the power to live, even on a subway platform.

Let us be looking for the risen Christ this week and this year, and let us rely on his power to help us live.