

Easter 1B
Mark 16:1-8

Pastor Wayne Peterson
April 8, 2012

Jack Clark was one of my professors in college. He was one of the most intelligent persons I have ever met – the type of person who, even though he is gracious and kind-hearted, intimidates the heck out of you when speaking to him one-on-one because he’s so dang smart.

And so I remember I was surprised when he once mentioned in a class that he had never seen the movie *The Ten Commandments*, the big epic by Cecil B. DeMille starring Charlton Heston as Moses. From other conversations, I knew that he was an avid movie-goer, and as is still the case today, *The Ten Commandments* was on television every year, so it wasn’t like he had never had the opportunity to see it. Dr. Clark explained to us that he intentionally avoided watching *The Ten Commandments* and the reason he did so was because he did not want the movie to limit his own imagination as he read the story.

I’ve come to learn that Dr. Clark was exactly right about this. As wonderful as movies are, they do actually limit us because, once we have seen a movie, it is hard to allow any other image to push the movie’s interpretation aside in our mind. It’s true that when I think of Moses, I “see” Charlton Heston.

Dr. Clark’s insight came to mind this week as I was reading Mark’s brief account of the first Easter Day. The women come to the tomb, discover the stone had been rolled away, and when they enter the tomb they meet a young man who says, “Don’t be alarmed. You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.”

A phrase jumped out at me this time I read the passage that I hadn’t really noticed before. It is in the directive to “go tell the disciples *and Peter*.” Peter is one of the disciples, of course. If the women tell the disciples, Peter will hear the news. There is no need to single him out. So why does Peter get special attention?

I read something this week that caused me to rethink my mental image of Peter, a mental image that I realize comes from movies about the story of Jesus that I’ve seen over the years. In those movies, Peter has been portrayed as about the same age as Jesus, which would put him in his early 30’s at the time he was following Jesus. Leonardo’s famous painting of the Last Supper portrays Peter as being balding and gray-haired, much older than Jesus. Recalling Dr. Clark’s insight, I realized that my image of Peter came not from the Biblical texts, but from movies and paintings. The article I read this week suggested that Peter and many of the disciples may have been teenagers when they started following Jesus. We have to realize that 2000 years ago, there was no concept of someone being a teenager. At age 13 in the Jewish community, at their bar mitzvah or bath mitzvah, a person was considered an adult. Marriages were arranged and it was typical for both men and women to be married by age 15 or 16.

When we first meet Peter in the gospels, he is working as a fisherman with his brother, Andrew. We know he is married, for Jesus goes to Peter's house and heals Peter's mother-in-law. In the culture of 1st century Judea, it's very possible that Peter was working and a married man and be only 16 years old when he met Jesus, which would make him 19 or 20 at the time of Jesus' death and resurrection. I had never considered that possibility before, but much of what we know about Peter certainly fits with my own experiences as a 19-year old and my observations of 19-year olds in general. They can be idealistic and impulsive; they have a sense of optimism not yet tarnished by disappointments and failures; they can latch onto an idea or cause and put all their energy into it. Peter was all of that – he left his job to follow a charismatic teacher named Jesus; he was the first to blurt out that Jesus was God's promised messiah; he brashly contradicted Jesus when Jesus said he would suffer and die. When Jesus announced that one of the disciples would betray him, Peter expressed confidence bordering on bravado that he would never be disloyal and betray Jesus. According to John's gospel, it was Peter who, in the face of a large contingent of soldiers, brashly took a sword to defend Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane and cut off the ear of the slave of the high priest.

There is of course no way to know if Peter was 19, 29, or 39 on that first Easter morning, but if I put my movie images aside, I am free to imagine that Peter was 19. So when the women are told "to go tell the disciples and Peter" that Jesus is raised, I can imagine them going to this young man who must have been devastated – deeply disillusioned and ashamed of himself for his poor performance as a disciple in the past two days – brandishing a sword, denying that he knew Jesus, and then hiding in fear while Jesus was nailed to a cross.

At this point, Peter was just about the poorest excuse for a Christian disciple that one could imagine, yet the gospel message of the resurrection is said to be especially for him. Go and tell Peter that Jesus is raised. Go and tell Peter that in spite of his fickleness, in spite of his actions not measuring up to his words, in spite of his failure to live up to Jesus' expectations and his own expectations, Jesus has a message he wants to make sure is given to Peter in person. And that message from the risen Jesus is this – "you may have messed up, you may not be the shining example of a disciple that you thought you were, but I forgive you and I have great plans for you yet. So get back to Galilee because that's home for you, and get about your work, because that's where you will see me."

If this morning you find that you have some things in common with Peter – like Peter, you have messed up some things in your life (in your relationships with members of your family, your co-workers, your friends); like Peter, your track record as a disciple of Jesus is less than stellar – then I think it is appropriate for you to substitute your name for Peter's in this text and hear it as a word of good news addressed directly to you: Go tell the disciples and _(insert your name)_, tell them that the final chapter hasn't been written yet. Jesus is risen and on the loose. You may have messed up in ways big or small, but the kingdom of God is all about forgiveness, second chances, new creation. So go to Galilee – or Plymouth or Maple Grove or Wayzata or whatever is Galilee, whatever is "home", for you – and be ready to experience new creation, a new you, a person freed from the grudges and failures of the past and filled with hope for a new future, for Christ is risen, your sins are forgiven, and you Peter (or whatever your name is) you are a new person in Christ. Alleluia! Amen.