

March 31, 2024

YOU'LL NEVER WALK ALONE

Mark 16:1-8

What lies ahead for us? What does the future hold? We really don't know, do we?

We can look at our own lives and count the many times when the unexpected happened, when things took an unexpected turn for good or for bad; when we found ourselves on a path that we did not foresee and for which we did not plan.

What lies ahead for us? What does the future hold? We really don't know, and it's the not knowing that scares us.

It scares us because we realize that we really are not as in control as we would like to be, for we cannot control what we do not know, we cannot change what we do not understand. And that can make us feel vulnerable and afraid – afraid of the unknown, so we often find ourselves worrying about what may or may not happen.

What lies ahead for us? What does the future hold? We really don't know, but the bigger question is: do we really want to know? What if we all knew with absolute certainty how every day and every event would unfold? That would surely make life a lot more predictable but a whole lot less interesting, wouldn't it?

If we knew the outcome of everything in advance, life would lose its adventures, its surprises, and the thrill and satisfaction of discovery. It would become dull and uninteresting.

And for some of us, life would be downright miserable and terrifying if we knew what lies ahead. There are some things that we would rather not know about, at least not now. There are some things that are better left unsaid.

Whether we approach the future with fear, eager interest, or both, one thing is certain: We cannot escape the unknown.

Expected or not, prepared or not, we will face times of joy and times of sadness; we will experience brokenness and healing; we will embrace life and encounter death; when and how, we do not know.

On Good Friday, some women found themselves witnessing what they never expected to see; they witnessed Jesus publicly mocked, ridiculed and put to death on the cross like a common criminal.

On Easter Sunday, those women again witnessed something they never expected to see: Jesus, alive – resurrected! Their response was very much like our response to life with its unknowns. We are told that they left the tomb in joy and in fear.

Joy and fear filled their minds, and Joy and fear mark much of our lives as well; in fact, it seems that our lives are always swinging like a pendulum between joy and fear. And it often is the case that the very things that give us the greatest joys are the things that cause us the greatest fears. The birth of a baby brings us great joy, but then we spend so much of our lives worrying about that child, even when that child has grown to be an adult.

We love the things and people in our lives that bring us joy, and for that very reason, we are understandably fearful of losing them. We just do not know what lies ahead.

We long for a better, fuller, more meaningful, and fulfilling life. Deep down inside, we know that we have not yet reached the limits of our abilities and achievements; we have not fully explored the depths of our relationships or given full flight to our imagination and creativity. We know that there are joys that we have yet to truly experience. Yet we hold back, often because of fear - fear of the unknown and fear of failure.

God understands that.

The women at the tomb of Jesus were filled with joy and fear. And in that clash of emotions, God's message to them was, *"Do not 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 is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you."* (Mark 16:6-7)

**"Jesus has been raised from the dead and he is going ahead of you."** What a powerful and reassuring message! We may not know what lies ahead for us, but we know who goes ahead of us.

As we enter the future with its unknowns, we don't have to worry about whether God will show up. We don't have to wonder whether God will show up when things get messy as they often do. We don't have to wonder whether God will be there to help us pick up the pieces when things fall apart. We don't have to wonder whether God will show up when pain and sadness enter our lives. We don't have to wonder whether God will be there when we decide to take that leap of faith and try something new.

The message of the resurrection is that Jesus has been raised from the dead, and he is going ahead of us into the places and moments of our lives.

As we face life's moments of joy or sadness, of certainty or uncertainty, we do so knowing that God does not wait to be invited into our experiences; God is there ahead of us. God waits for us up ahead—waits for us to get moving, to catch up to what God is doing. God waits ahead of us to offer us hope and strength, joy and renewal in all of life.

And when we come to the end of our lives and we face the greatest unknown, we know that even there, Jesus has gone before us, and we need not fear, for we will never walk alone. That is what the resurrection promises.

"In life, in death, in life beyond death, God is with us. We are not alone. Thanks be to God."

Rev. Sydney Elias