

A Storytelling Commentary on Mark 16:1-8

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This story is seen and told from the perspective of the women. It is a description of their interior experience. It is a very quiet story that focuses on their perspective throughout the entire story. It begins with their grief as they prepare to go out and anoint Jesus. On the way they discuss, "Who will roll away the stone for us?" There is a major surprise at the stone being rolled away. The women thought they were going to have to find someone who could roll the stone back. They expected to find someone to help them, but they did not expect that the stone would already be rolled back.

Finding a young man in the tomb is also a surprise. He is sitting at the right hand—the place of power—and is clothed in a white robe. The white robe is a clear allusion to his identity as an angel, a divine messenger. However, Mark does not say that he is an angel, as happens in Matthew and Mark. The women are alarmed and amazed at his presence.

After the young man's announcement, the focus is on the women's response: terror, amazement, trembling, astonishment, fear. The telling of this story needs to convey as much as possible those emotions in a quiet and non-demonstrative way. In telling the story, the most important character is the young man. He is the only one who has speeches in this part of the story. It is the voice of a young man speaking very quietly in the tomb to women whom he knows are overwhelmed with grief. You will want to work on the voice of the young man in your telling preparation. He is supremely confident, authoritative, clear, but also compassionate.

The reversals of the story implicit in the resurrection are incredible: shame to glory, fear to hope, grief to joy, death to life, defeat to victory. All of these reversals are implicit. The reversal that is identified and explicitly named is crucifixion to resurrection. The shame of crucifixion is turned into the honor of the resurrection. In ancient culture, this was probably the most powerful understanding of the crucifixion-to-resurrection reversal of expectation.

A second explicit reversal is presence and absence: "Look at the place where they laid him" and "He's not here." The expectation is for there to be a corpse; the reversal is that there is no corpse. Where has he gone? He is on the way to Galilee, to the place where they knew him, and there they will see him. This is a sign of the transformation of grief into joy, of the loss of relationship into the reestablishment of living presence.

The commission to the women is utterly unprecedented in the entire narrative tradition of Israel. Never before have women been commissioned to take a message of divine intervention and to communicate it. The women are totally unprepared for this role. Dimensions of their terror and astonishment are both about the resurrection and their commission to go and tell. Their response to this news is thoroughly appropriate to an

epiphany on the one hand, and an unprecedented commission on the other hand: "Go and tell." So another dimension to the reversal that is present here is the joy and anticipation of their going and telling which is then reversed by their saying nothing to anyone.

In telling this story you need to contrast the commission to go and tell with their reaction: they go and flee. Who is it that previously fled? It was the young man at the arrest; it was all the disciples. They ran away, they fled. The same word is used in both instances. Therefore, we may deduce that the women were running away from the possibility of getting arrested and being killed. This danger is also present for those who first heard Mark tell the story. Those who are in Mark's audience know that those who would tell this story in the context of the Roman world after the Jewish war that ended in 70 A.D. quite possibly would be arrested and killed.

The dynamic of the telling of this story, then, is to convey the range of emotions that is present here and all of the dynamics that are happening. It is all in the classic tradition of biblical narrative. It is classic biblical storytelling understatement, in which the listeners can figure out what is going on because it is implied in these few words.