

Acclaimed American novelist Ernest Hemingway published his first book in 1926. He toyed with a couple of possible titles for his story about a group of friends making their way to the running of the bulls in Pamplona, Spain.

One early title was *The Fiesta*, which sounds, well, festive.

Another was *The Lost Generation*, which used the name of the post-WWI generation trying to recover from the horrors of the “Great War.” This was clearly a much darker title. He settled on the title that you probably know as his greatest work, *The Sun Also Rises*.

While sunrises generally are something with positive connotations, Hemingway derived the title from a pessimistic passage in the book of Ecclesiastes, expressing a cynical disillusion in keeping with the postwar attitude.

⁴ A generation goes, and a generation comes, . . .

[but the earth remains for ever.]

⁵ The sun also rises, and the sun goes down,

[and hurries to the place where it rises.]

The phrase “the sun also rises” could just mean time rolls on. Grass withers. Flowers fade. What we think is important and meaningful now will all be gone. And a new generation will come and do it all over again.

Or in other words from Ecclesiastes [1:9]:

“What has been is what will be,
and what has been done is what will be done;
there is nothing new under the sun.”

It’s a sentiment that’s easy to understand, the despair, the pessimism. Bridges fall, the wealthy and the powerful take advantage of the weak. The slaughter and horror in Gaza—just down the road from Jerusalem, where our story takes place—is unimaginable. Climate change is threatening nearly every corner of the world. Gun violence affecting children right here in St Paul.

And we are weary of the brokenness of the world.

Our empathy is overloaded, hopes fade, and we suffer compassion overload. As Henry David Thoreau famously said,

“...we do not treat ourselves nor one another . . . tenderly. The mass of human beings lead lives of quiet desperation.

Quiet desperation and resignation certainly describe the three women in our text this morning. The optimistic hope of a messiah who would deliver his people from Roman oppression had been shattered.

The three women, the two Marys and Salome,
Had been there and witnessed the crucifixion,
when darkness covered the whole land,
They heard Jesus himself cry out despondently
wondering why even God had forsaken him,
The two Marys had looked on as Joseph of Arimathea collected Jesus's body,
And laid it in a tomb that was hewn out of rock,
And they watched Joseph roll a massive stone in front of the entrance.

They must have thought,
The Sun also rises on the next generation when this one is gone.
What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done;
there is nothing new under the sun.

Here was one more good person, executed by the empire,
A murdered messiah
Rome's unmitigated brutal power
Squashing even a hint of any other kingdom,
even a spiritual kingdom,
A kingdom not of this world.

And let us pause to appreciate these faithful women for a moment.
Make no mistake,
They are the ONLY faithful persons in this story.
The disciples? Gone. Nowhere to be found.
Only the women. Only the powerless.
Only the marginalized are standing with their crucified Lord.
Only the outsiders show up
to care for the physical remains of their teacher.

Having planned ahead and purchased the spices the night before, the women are up early, headed to the tomb, to anoint the body.
Without embalming, it was one last way to care for the beloved deceased,

To anoint with aromatic spices and perfumes
To cover up the stench of the decomposing body.

And the text states what might seem obvious,
“very early on the first day of the week, *when the sun had risen*, they went to
the tomb.”

The sun is up. It's daylight. Night is gone.

With their heads no doubt spinning,
it's a wonder the women even thought about the chief problem in front of
them—who would roll away the great stone at the tomb's entrance?

But then, in the daylight, they see that the stone was rolled away.

Probably simply counting their good luck they head on into the tomb,
heads down,
Spirits lower than that,
 Readying themselves to see Jesus body,
 Readying themselves for their sacred task of anointing.

But Jesus isn't there. And some young man is! In a white robe!

We aren't told if it's an angel or not. We tend to assume so because he says what
angels always say, “Don't be alarmed.”

And then he tells them the “too good to be true news”:

“you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been
raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. 7But 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.”

And not surprisingly, the women get out of the tomb as fast as possible,
because, as the text tells us,
terror and amazement had seized them;
and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

That's some ending to a gospel, huh?! Thanks a lot, Mark!

It's pretty strange, isn't it, to have a resurrection story without Jesus being there,
with the last word being “afraid”?

As a favorite commentator put it, Fred Craddock:
“Is this any way to run a resurrection?
Is this enough to persuade,
to stir new life in the followers of Jesus?”

A little side note: this ending of Mark made later scribes nervous too,
so they added a couple of different endings to Mark,
a shorter and longer version,
that are usually designated in contemporary Bibles.
However, the scholarly consensus is that
these eight verses are the original ending of Mark.

Back to the emotions that seized the women (in the tomb as the white-robed young man filled them in:) *terror and amazement*.

The words are even stronger in Greek: *tromos* (trauma) and *ecstasis* (ecstasy).
That’s a weird combination isn’t it?
We’ve experienced or seen trauma.
And we’ve experienced or seen ecstasy.

Two different things. Seized by trauma and ecstasy they said nothing to anyone. They couldn’t get any words out.

Trauma has to do with
being wounded by deeply distressing or disturbing experiences.

Ecstasy has the sense of being blissfully jubilant,
One preacher put it this way:

They were scared out of their skin,
They were beside themselves with joy. (Roger Nelson)

The word for trauma only shows up a handful of times in the New Testament, and elsewhere when it does, it’s always paired with the word “fear,” as in “fear and trembling.”

The only other time this word for ecstasy is used in Mark is, get this,
the response of the crowd when Jesus brought to life the dead little girl in Mark 5:42.

42And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with *amazement*.

So what do we make of this unique version of the resurrection that results in *trauma and ecstasy*? Let me suggest two things.

First, this resurrection appearance is one we can all relate to.

Lutheran Scholar Barbara Kay Lundblad puts it this way:

Of all the Easter Gospels, Mark's story invites us to stand where those first trembling witnesses stood.

Those three women didn't see Jesus. Neither do we.

They didn't hear Jesus call their names. Neither have we.

They weren't invited to touch his wounded hands.

We haven't touched Jesus hands either.

Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome are our silent sisters.

The narrative is left for us, the readers, to complete . . .

Secondly, Mark actually gives us a colossal hint about how we "complete the narrative."

The white-robed young man tells the women to "Go to Gallilee" because they will find Jesus there. But that's not just a geographic command from Mark,

it's the way Mark's gospel begins.

Go back to the beginning, read it again,

Now you know the rest of the story.

Commentator Tom Long say that he thinks Mark's gospel ends this way so that we'll feel as discombobulated as the women and go back to the beginning of the gospel to read it again.

And more than one scholar suggest a reader response critique,

Saying that Mark pointing out that the women's silence

Actually gives US the task given to them by the messenger:

"Will we go and tell others that the crucified one is raised from the dead and that we will see him again?" (-Chelsey Harmon)

Will our amazement overcome our terror,

So that we rejoice in the Resurrection?

* * *

So on this Easter morn in 2024, let us remember again, that Christ was raised from the dead. This event in history reorients and reminds us that God's love will always work to overcome the world.

As the text in Mark tells us,
the sun rose on that first Easter morning,
And it shattered the darkness of the night
And it crushed the darkness of the crucifixion on Good Friday

But the Son, S-O-N, also rose that Easter morning,
And shattered the darkness of sin, and selfishness,
And crushed the darkness of despair and death.

And even if it is hard to grasp a resurrected savior,
And maybe even we too are filled with "terror and amazement,"

We take comfort in the words of the white-robed young man,

"Do not be alarmed;
you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth,
who was crucified.
He has been raised"!

Christ is Risen! Christ is Risen indeed!

Thanks be to God, Amen.