

“Fool”
Mark 16:1-8
April 1, 2018 Easter Sunday
The Rev. Dr. Mark W. Jennings

I used to hate April Fool's Day. When I was a kid, especially the years in elementary school, I was afraid of April Fool's Day because I didn't want to look like a fool. Kids would play tricks or tell me something outrageous and I would believe them. I always fell for it. And then I would be embarrassed. I felt stupid. I felt like a fool.

Do you know where April Fool's Day comes from? There's lots of debate about this, but some scholars believe that it has to do with New Year's Day. Did you ever wonder how they decided when a new calendar year begins? Why January 1? Why not start the year on June 1st? Or October 1st? Why not start the new year on October 17th, my birthday—seems like a good time to me, I change how old I am so we can change the calendars that day too. For a thousand years, the Western world used what was called the Julian calendar. That was a good calendar but not precise enough and so in the 16th century most of the world began to change over to the Gregorian calendar by the order of Pope Gregory. Under the old calendar, much of Europe celebrated the new year on March 25th. That may seem like a strange date to celebrate New Year's, I mean, wouldn't you think you would have the new year at the beginning of one of the months? Well, for almost a thousand years, they didn't. They considered March 25th to be a much more significant date. Why March 25th? When you realize that nine months after March 25th is December 25th, Christmas Day, then you discover that March 25th is Annunciation Day, the day that the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary to tell her that she was going to be the mother of Jesus. Something new was coming into the world, so that was a day that since we were now counting the years, anno domini, the year of our Lord, that's when we should begin counting and that's when the new year should be.

By the sixteenth century when it was time to change the calendars so they would be more accurate, it made more sense to begin the year at the beginning of the first month. Some people took longer to

change. They liked the new year on Annunciation Day and since they also celebrated the festival for a week following March 25th, the first normal day of the new year was always April 1st. To the rest of society, these old stick in the muds, these folks who refused to change, or who kept forgetting, were called April Fools. April Fool's Day. One of my least favorite days. Always scared of looking the fool.

In the passage we read today we also have some people who are scared. The gospel of Mark ends in a strange way. The women who come to the tomb on Easter morning are told that Jesus is not there, that he has risen, and then they run away and they don't say anything because they were afraid. Wait, where are the disciples? Where's the appearance of the risen Jesus to his friends and they all rejoice? That doesn't happen in Mark. It just stops here. It's such a strange way to end his gospel that later authors have attempted to add in what Mark left out. Some of the ancient manuscript have different endings to Mark where Jesus does appear to the twelve and there's a more traditional ending. But probably Mark actually ended it here. They ran away and said nothing, for they were afraid.

What were they afraid of? Why not say something to the disciples? Why keep quiet? Mark says they were afraid. Would something happen to them if they went and told Peter and James and John and the others? What's the worst that could happen to them? The disciples would go and check it out for themselves. Were they afraid of the Romans or the chief priests? They're not going to believe them anyway, so why were they afraid?

Someone they loved, whom they followed, who was so important to them has died, they watched him die and now they are told that he has risen from the dead and is alive. How often does that happen? Like never, right? So is anyone going to believe them? If they go and tell the disciples, will they be believed? Not a chance. They will look like fools. They will be embarrassed, people will think that they are crazy believing something that is so obviously untrue. Nobody comes back to life. That's foolish. The women know that. Maybe they too are afraid of looking like fools.

What about you? Are you afraid? I still am. I hate being embarrassed. I hate making a mistake and

looking like an idiot. But what about today. We came in here and said, “he is risen!” Do we really think that? Well maybe we mean that his resurrection is a symbolic thing, that Easter is really like a return of new life after the dead of winter. Or maybe we think that the resurrection of Jesus is a spiritual thing, that we mean that his teaching survives and his spirit lives on and inspires us after all these years. Because to think that on the third day, when his body had already begun to decay, that somehow that process was turned around and he was not only renewed and restored but made more glorious than ever, well that’s a bit crazy, don’t you think? Has that ever happened before, or since? People might think we are fools if we believe that.

But that’s what I believe. Maybe I am a fool, maybe there’s times I look like an idiot. But I think that he actually was raised that day. That’s the only thing that makes sense to me. That’s the only reason I can think of that the disciples changed from these fearful men and women who were afraid to show their faces to people who no longer cared if they were thrown into prison or put to death. Because they had seen the resurrected Jesus. Not just his spirit, not just being glad winter was over. Something happened to them that changed their lives. Something happened to me to change my life. To give me purpose. To bring me peace. To give me hope for this world and for life beyond the grave. And to show me love, what love really is. That he really lived, and really died, and really rose again. Is that what you believe? Even if you look like a fool? Let’s be fools together, fools for Christ’s sake.