

"Now They Know" Mark 16:1-8; Acts 10:34-43; Easter, 2009; Albany UMC

This week's article of the *Emphasis* magazine has this story I want to share with you.

"Clarence Jordan wrote *The Cotton Patch Gospel*, a version of the New Testament in the dialect of the rural South. He maybe best known for that scripture paraphrase, but in the 1960s Jordan, a white pastor, founded an interracial community in Georgia called Koinonia Farms. (Wow, we are talking about 60s in the South; you know what would happen). People all around him intentionally avoided Jordan. Threats were made to his life, but he persevered.

In 1969, Clarence Jordan died of a heart attack. None of the local funeral directors were willing to help with his funeral—out of either prejudice or fear of violence—so he ended up being buried in a plain cedar box on a hillside near his farm.

Jordan's friend, Millard Fuller, founder of Habitat for Humanity, officiated at the funeral. When the service was ended, it was time to lower the casket into the ground. Just as this was happening, Fuller's two-year-old daughter stepped up to the grave and began to sing the only song she knew: "Happy Birthday to you, happy birthday to you, happy birthday dear Clarence, happy birthday to you."

As Fuller later told the story, it seemed to all who were present that God was somehow behind that innocent, childlike song. For what they had all been celebrating that day, on a Georgia hillside, was not a death after all: but a wonderful, glorious rebirth." (*Emphasis*, Vol.39 No.1, 2009)

There are many ways we can talk about the Easter story; preachers would come up with some theories to prove the resurrection; some would try to defend the doctrine by citing many biblical texts here and there.

But for me, it is always important to see that resurrection is not a theory; it is not just something that happened in history; it is something you experience yourselves and you experience it in your heart by the power of the Holy Spirit; and you experience it when you feel that the presence of God is real to you.

I have shared with you my personal stories many times. But I want to tell you one more time. To me, God is not something abstract; God is not something you learn from school; God is the One you meet personally in your life.

I was not raised in a Christian family; still, the rest of my family members in Korea are not really active members of a church; but God gave me this privilege to know Him personally.

It is the Holy Spirit who came and touched my heart; so that I had to do what I had to do; I had to become a preacher; there was no other way; there was no other thing I could do; I had to do it in the past twenty years; I still have to do it; I have to stand before you now and tell you that God is real and the resurrection is real. There is no doubt, there is no second thought.

On the first day I went to church in 1975, my heart became warmed strangely; it was the Spirit of God that touched my heart. Since then, I have never regretted anything; I have never stopped going to church.

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Of course, there were low moments in my life; but deep in my heart I never doubted the love of God. As far as the resurrection is concerned, I have to tell you this once again. My stepfather died when I was 19. And I still remember the feeling that I had. As the man of the house, I had to deal with a human death. Those of you who went through this may remember what I mean. It was tough; it was hard; especially those first couple of days before the funeral.

But I still remember how much appreciative I was when Rev. Baik, the then pastor of the church, came and gave us a message of hope and comfort in those dark difficult moments. The pastor is now gone too; but I never forgot him.

To me, the hope and promise that I have as a Christian always comes from that experience. To me, the resurrection story is the bottom line of my faith; Jesus died but God raised him from the dead; those who believe in Jesus will live even though they die. Period! There is no other explanation; there is no other Gospel.

Death did not have the final word; it was the power of God that has the final say over us all.

We cannot explain all this; it is not a theory; it is God's grace; it is by the work of the Spirit that we experience all this mystery.

This morning, we have two New Testament texts, one from Acts and the other, Mark.

Let me talk about Mark's text first. As I said last week, the Gospel of Mark is very unique not only in its content but also in the way it lays out its account. It is very different from the other Gospels. If you read Mark's Gospel, you will notice that every time Jesus performed a miracle Jesus said, "Shh! Don't tell them about this."

People did not understand this; the whole thing is that they did not even know who Jesus really was. Then, Jesus always told them about his death and resurrection over and over. This is the pattern that runs through the whole Gospel:

8:31 "Jesus began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again."

9:31 "Jesus was teaching his disciples, saying to them, "The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again."

10:33-34, Jesus says: "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles; ³⁴ they will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again."

The mood is gloomy; one of the phrases that keep popping up is "they were afraid." In today's Mark text, a few ladies show up at the tomb early in the morning. And the verse 8 says: "They said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid."

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In Mark's Gospel, Jesus' disciples, the guys, were not even around; they were already long gone hiding while those women watched Jesus die on the cross and braved themselves to be at the graveside on the Easter morning.

But that's ok.

We were not there either. What makes us believe what we believe is not from what we see but what we hear. "Faith *comes* from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ," Paul says in Romans 10:17; the Spirit of God makes us believe what we hear. And God still speaks to us through his people.

So in Mark's text, Peter was nothing; he was the one who betrayed Jesus three times; after the betrayal he tried to be close to Jesus, but not close enough; when Jesus died, he just went hiding; that's it.

But we see him in Acts' text. Peter is before the crowd telling them, "We are witnesses of all the things; they put him to death but God raised him up."

It was the Spirit of God that changed him; it was the power of God that brought him to this place.

What the scriptures say to us is clear: people were afraid.

Mark is portraying our human nature in a very genuine way; even followers of Jesus Christ sometimes wonder about their faith. It is not just Mark's audience 2000 years ago; we are all like that.

When it comes to the faith issue, we sometimes have more questions than answers. As a preacher, Mark knew all about this. That was why he was so focused on people who were afraid and people who could not understand Jesus' teaching.

But his message is this: "The secret is all out at last!"

When Jesus died and rose again, he said, they knew the answer: Jesus was finally revealed to them as the Son of God; Jesus was known to them in the dying and the rising;

More importantly, they came to understand their own suffering and dying in a new light. They knew, even though they die, they would live because Jesus lives.

The same is true to all of us.

You and I will live even though we die.

Amen.