

Sermon – Easter Sunday
Mark 16:1-8
April 1, 2018

"An Ending That Wasn't the Finale"

Next weekend golf's most famous tournament, "*The Masters*" is being played, while this weekend baseball started its new season. Back in the 1950's, when they were considered the kings of their sport, golfer Sam Snead and baseball great Ted Williams debated which was the more difficult - hit a baseball or a golf ball. Williams mocked the calm, quiet atmosphere of golf, where the audience is silent during play and the ball rests right in front of you. He contrasted the ease of hitting a stationary golf ball with trying to pick up the speed and direction of a curveball while thousands of fans are screaming at you. Courteously Mr. Snead listened, then in his Southern drawl said; "*Ted I see your point. But here's the deal...you get as many foul balls as you want...I gotta chase each one of mine down and play em from wherever they land.*"

Baseball has "do-overs", while golf at least officially, doesn't. What I mean is that golf, at least the version played by folks like me has what are known as "mulligans" (second chances on a particular shot). My daughter once looked at a golf scorecard I brought home and said '*gee dad...you made a good score today. But what's those little "m's" you wrote down next to your score on some of the holes? Oh, right, I said, that stands for "made"...those were holes I, uh, "made" a long putt on*'. "Cool" she said. "*How come there's two "m's" on some holes then? Ah...probably where I had a really "mammoth" tee shot then "made" a really long putt!*"! The look on her face told me I was losing credibility by the *minute!*

(Put up screen with Mark 16:7-8) Even though we ended our reading with Mark 16:8, verse 7 is an ending too - a much better one at that. Verse 7 says God has done what he said he would – raise Jesus from death and send him on ahead of his followers to a place called Galilee – that was where Jesus' ministry had begun three years earlier. When the young man at the tomb tells the women "*Jesus is going ahead of you into Galilee, there you will see him, just as he told you*", we need to hear that as "*let the do-overs commence.*" At his trial two days earlier, many had tried to discredit Jesus, saying his words didn't add up – he couldn't be relied upon, and for some the crucifixion was proof positive that God had abandoned Jesus. Many had criticized him for saying he could forgive sins – only God could do that. Most everyone brushed off his teachings about eternal life – doubting there was such a thing. The resurrection of Jesus told them to do some thinking over again. Some of those doubters were Jesus' own followers. Mark 16:7 says "*you've got a do over*" folks. Come and see for yourself!

Verse 8 on the other hand reminds us why "do overs" are precisely what we need. Maybe it was "*first tee jitters*", you know, the nerves got to the ladies, but man they hit one seriously out of bounds. As an "ending" verse 8 is a pretty disappointing beginning to the story of how Jesus is going to introduce- through his followers - a kingdom where life worked for everyone like it was meant to.

So why did Mark end the resurrection day story saying; "*they said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid*"? I'll tell you. Mark has a subtle but important point to make about grace and the way a person needs to think about the most important subjects of all – how we live their lives and what our eternal destiny will be. Verse 7 is God's turn at bat – every curve ball the world has thrown his way he turned around and hit it out of the park – sins could be forgiven, eternal life was real, his words could be relied upon. His resurrection proved it.

Verse 8 however is our turn at bat, and it's not a good one. We don't know what to do with the enormity of grace - that's not how the world we live in operates. But is that not the more honest way we humans connect with this story? God is God, and God does all things well. We're human, and that means..."*hey mulligan man*"! How many times were you this close to witnessing about your faith and you...changed the subject to baseball!? How often were you the one about to hear someone's faith story and you did the same? How often might this describe your experience – you've heard the death of Jesus means the forgiveness of your sins, and you know the resurrection of Jesus, attested by hundreds of eyewitnesses means God wants what Jesus was saying and doing to continue. So you know and want to live like a mature Christian person and make good choices...and then you drop the ball?

Welcome to Mark 16:8 everyone. Here's the genius of Mark's ending that is really a beginning. Verse 7 resolves God's story. It says Jesus Christ is alive and doing everything he promised he would. Verse 8 is our story, our turn at bat. Mark is the gospel for people who need another swing at things...a gospel that promises mulligans. Mark's gospel is full of examples of Jesus giving his followers, who struggled and stumbled their way through three years with him, "do-overs." This is the gospel for folks who morally and spiritually can't seem to get it right the first time. Sound like anyone you know? When our congregation makes a confession of sin, we make sure, for good reason, to include "*things left undone*." The women in Mark 16:8 who fled the tomb set the standard for "*things left undone*", so our confession puts us in good company.

Let face it, you're not having Easter brunch today because the Hallmark Card Company told you about Jesus' resurrection. It didn't originate in your Facebook feed. That news had to have come from three women who saw in the face of Jesus a Savior, not a judge. The women got a "do over", and they didn't miss the second time. That's Easter's newsfeed. Easter is possibility for sinners unlimited, because it's grace from God unending. Easter is grief absorbed by God, because of the grief observed by God. Easter is good intentions become godly resolve because a man called Jesus changed three women from rookie failures to role models. And now we're up - it's our turn. Jesus Christ is Risen... HE IS RISEN INDEED!

Actor Leslie Nielson once said of the game of golf – “the reason they call it golf is that the other four letter words were used up!”

