

Mark 16:1-8
Easter Sunday
Amazed and Astonished

Emily Dickinson wrote, "**Tell all the truth but tell it slant/ [...] the Truth must dazzle gradually or every man go blind.**" You can be sure she meant women too - anyone who sees the Truth not slant, but straight on in all its blinding radiance.

The women who came early that first Easter morning are fine examples of why Dickinson cautioned us to tell the truth slant.

In Mark's gospel, these women get the Truth in their face full bore, not slant, and they are terrified. **Jesus is alive!**

Well, I would be terrified too!

That the news came from the lips of a young man dressed as angel might, sitting casually, crossed legs in the tomb, didn't reduce their terror one bit. "Don't be amazed." He says calmly.

Right. Don't be amazed! Are you kidding me?
What's more amazing than this?

The One who was crucified,
whose broken, battered, blood drenched body
we saw with our own eyes,
whose wounds we are here to tend,
is not in this tomb
but alive in this world?
And you are telling us: "don't be amazed?"

Well, young Mr. Angel: maybe that's the way they do things where you come but not here.

Don't be amazed? *What??*

Our knees are buckling,
 our hands trembling,
 our hearts beating wildly trying to keep pace with our brains
 straining to comprehend what is over the cliff of our
 understanding.
 Jesus is risen from the dead!

What do we do with our spines?
 When you are shocked you, you get silly.
 We might as well melt here and now.
 No, that won't help – so let's just run away from here as fast possible
 Maybe we'll figure it out later.

Let the scholars debate over this strange ending of Mark's gospel,
 with the women racing away afraid to say a word to anyone. They
 can puzzle over the various endings that later editors attached to the
 original to make matters conform with a more joyous telling.

I, for one, take comfort in Mark's original ending because it tells a
 real human response when confronted, straight on - not slant - by
 something so astonishing as the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.
 As our translation put it, the first witnesses left in a state of shock.

**The traditional translation says they were trembling with
 astonishment.**

How about that for a honest response to the resurrection?
Trembling with astonishment.

This is how I want to live in this world: ***trembling with astonishment
 at the power of God to do what is impossible. I think we all want
 to live this way – caught in the wonders of God.***

Everything about the resurrection fills my life

with amazement, wonder and renewed hope
that good things are possible in this broken, battered world
that I can neither control nor predict or even imagine.

The resurrection of Jesus tells us that while the sting of death is real
and the powers of death will crucify love,
death is not the only story to be told.

The resurrection of Jesus invites you and me to believe that life,
God's life, rises up even in the places of death;
that crucified love is still God's love
and it will find a way overturn hatred, enmity and bitter despair.
That includes Parkland and Charleston and Las Vegas and Orlando
and Sutherland Springs and every other place of deadly violence.

Don't be amazed, say the white robed man to the women. Seriously?
Let me be a witness this Easter morning. **I am amazed!**

The Dalai Lama once said to the monk, Thomas Merton,
"show me the resurrection, and I will believe."

I am amazed by the power of the resurrection that leads believers
to practice mercy for the wounded and vulnerable,
to forgive those who have harmed them,
to offer hospitality to strangers and immigrants,
to stand with children and parents grieving
the slaughter of the innocent
to resist hatred
and generally behave in a manner that causes hard boiled cynics
to grind their teeth at such foolish acts of love and kindness.

Nor do I believe the resurrection of Jesus is fact that must fit into an
explanation conforming to our scientific understanding.

There are some things that are truly true that burst the paradigms that insist on controlling them. These are things Emily Dickinson said we must tell slant or they will blind us with their light.

The resurrection of Jesus shatters all expectations and explanations. It is a fact that will not lie down on the examining table for you to do an autopsy. The fact of the resurrection won't submit to our sharpened intellectual instruments, anymore than Jesus would stay in the tomb. When you start picking at the fact, trying to figure it all out - you you've missed the point.

The resurrection of Jesus that Christians celebrate this Easter morning is less about a fact to be analyzed and more about a way of life to be lived in faith. This way of life trembles every day with astonishment that God is alive among us.

We can forgive the women at the tomb for being reduced to silence and fear, trembling with astonishment on the edge of the impossible. They were the first to hear it and adjust to a whole new reality.

Today, you have heard the news again, and probably not for the first time. Today, just for today, will you dare to be a witness to the power of love over hate, mercy over cruelty, life that rises up in the place of death? In your own life? In our common life?

Just for today. I dare you to be astonished!
Christ is risen!
He is risen indeed.

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