**SERMON- Easter Sunday (B) St. Timothy’s (Herndon)
Charles R. Cowherd March 31, 2024**Isaiah 25:6-9 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 Mark 16:1-8 Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24

**OPENING:**It was not an instant classic.
The movies *Barbie* and *Oppenheimer,* Taylor Swift’s *Eras* Tour and this year’s Super Bowl—those were all “Instant Classics.”
“Instant Classics” are events that our culture has deemed “Classics” because they have lasting staying power and they are “Instant” because they are so memorable or powerful that we judge them immediately, in real time, to be worthy of that.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Do you know what was not an “Instant Classic”?
Easter.
Or more specifically Mark’s recounting of the Easter Story that I just read for you.
Or even more specifically, the women’s reaction to the empty Tomb.
They did not say anything. They were afraid.
This was not an “Instant Classic”
Nothing happened. Emptiness happened. Pain and grief and confusion happened.
They did not, according to Mark:
“Tell it on the mountain.
Over the hills and everywhere.”

Instead, it was a mere blip in the historical record.
Buried deep in the Metro section, below the fold in small print,
one could have *maybe* found:
“Carpenter rabbi from the Sticks crucified yesterday.”
Life goes on, business as usual,

**MARK’S GOSPEL**Do you know what was also not an “Instant Classic”?
Mark’s Gospel.
The Church, Christians, scholars of all shapes and sizes looked down on the supposed Cliff-notes version of Jesus’ life. So many mistakes: grammar, geography.
Not enough stories, not enough description.
And that ending, bizarre.
Today you came for the Resurrection, and there are NO resurrection appearances.

The pundits and the prognosticators, those who decide who gets to be an instant classic, want a Jesus who is sitting on the right hand of the Father, who can walk through walls, and assure us everything is okay.
But that Jesus does not bother to show up.
Instead he trusts his legacy to a couple of “hysterical women”
(That’s what the 3rd century historian called them… not me!)
And then a young man (not even an angel) who tells them:
“Let’s all meet back at the clubhouse in Galilee.”

Now I have preached and taught how the Gospel of Mark is my favorite and how reading this very passage affected my life deeply enough to name a son after it.
But Mark’s Gospel did not make a ripple in the Nielson ratings, it was not on the best seller list. Instead, it was the runt of the litter, the cliff notes version of Jesus’ biography, the ‘Ringo’ of the 4 gospels. We are in the Markan year in 2024 in our lectionary, but you even get the option to avoid it and choose the much meatier version from John. **CHRISTIANITY**

Do you know what was also not an “Instant Classic”?
Christianity. The Church.
It took about 4 centuries for it to get going. It had this long gestational period that was fraught with conflict and missteps and false starts. The movement that Jesus started was so pathetic that his followers fought among themselves, and the Roman Empire kind of ignored it.

It was almost like a seed in the ground, that was planted, buried and died.
Almost like a baby born to an out-of-wedlock family in an obscure backwater.
Almost like a group of fishermen called to be A-team ambassadors for the Gospel.
In the case of the church, it grew, fitfully and with false starts, such that here we are today, and we could not imagine a time when all the attention in the world would not have been paid to that empty tomb.
Now, the paparazzi would have been all over Mary and Mary and other women.
Now, the disciples would have had all best-selling ‘tell-all’ books and sit down interviews and Netflix specials.
Jesus’ brand would have been commodified and marketed.

Do you know what was not an “Instant Classic”?
This sermon, I gave it at 8 AM and I feel bad because they are so stoic and they just kind of accepted me going on and on about pain and absence and trauma.

**EASTER**
Instead, at least in Mark, we hear the story and there is no instant gratification or canonization.
Rather we get the fear of the women, the trauma of the absence of the tomb, and this sense that nothing happened, that the women were simply afraid, and they told no one.
I know it’s Easter today and we have the Lillies and the Hymns and we are about to have a baptism but let’s just linger there for a moment, in that cliffhanger that Mark writes, in this fade to black on the scene.

The disciples have scattered, they have failed Jesus. His hometown has failed him. His family has failed him The religious authorities have failed Jesus.
The Roman have succeeded, business goes on as usual in this obscure province. Even these women, the “hysterical” ones, they are there to anoint the body, they believe he is dead.
We could not possibly be further away from an Instant Classic, from franchising, from a sequel, from syndication. The tomb is cold and empty, and you have an angel talking nonsense.

**RESURRECTION**
I mentioned me reading this in the Seminary basement and the effect it had on me.
The effect was something like this:
the story fades to black, the chapter is over, the book is shut. The scene goes dark, the credits roll.
“… and they were afraid”….
But it’s not over.
God calls out to us in our darkest moments, in our pain and our grief and our sadness.
I have seen it my own life, this thing called resurrection.
I know what it to mean to die, but for God to say:
“I am not through with you yet, Meet me in Galilee,”
I have seen it in the life of the Church (capital C), and specifically in this church. You know it means to die, and for God to say “I am not through with you yet, St. Timothy’s. Meet me in Galilee!”

Mark’s story was not an Instant Classic.
Instead he buries it in the wisdom and fortitude and faith of these women, t
And they are scared, they are afraid, they tell no one.
They are knocked down, they are defeated, then they raise themselves off the mat and say “God is not through with us yet either.”
Let’s tell the disciples, even and especially that mansplaining Peter, and let’s go to Galilee.
We know that they did that because we are here on this day.
We know that because Mark is telling us, go back to Galilee, to start this pattern of discipleship again, start at the beginning of the Gospel.
Do you know what happens in Chapter One? A baptism.
Jesus’ baptism.
That’s the opening, the pilot episode for how to live our lives, to begin our faith journey.

**CONCLUSION**Do you know who/what are an instant classic?Clark Beury Belch
Marianna Winifred Kuchler
Daniel Alexander Kuchler.

They are each set to answer that call, to go to Galilee, to begin their lives in Christ.

I told each of them, when we were doing the Baptismal Prep, that I am not going to hold back on the water, that this is Easter and there will be a lot of people here, we want it to be memorable, to go viral, to get some clicks, to become an instant classic.

The theological reason to experience the water, is because of course that our ancestors did full immersion baptism, and that was what Jesus did in the Jordan. But also over these last 3 days in the grave. Dying and rising, death and birth. That’s what’s happening in Mark’s Gospel and that’s what’s happening here today:
“You will never be more dead then when you are in the water, you will never be more alive when you come out.”

We are all witnesses to that, we all get to play the part of Mary and Mary.
We watch these young people do it, we all hear the Easter truth.
We are all called to go back to Galilee to remember our own baptism and spread the words to others.
**AMEN**
 **AMEN**

1. The Case Against the "Instant Classic" - Mockingbird (mbird.com) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)