

**REFLECTION**  
**Easter Sunday 2021**  
**The Reverend Dr. Phebe L. McPherson**  
**Mark 16: 1-8**

*My life flows on in endless song;  
Above earth's lamentations.  
I catch the sweet, though far-off hymn  
That hails a new creation.*

**(Tune/Lyrics: Robert Lowry)**

In times like these—in the complexity and ambiguity of our daily lives— of pandemic and racial inequities and clashing cultures—*earth's lamentations*—we can still “*catch the sweet, though far-off hymn that hails a new creation.*” Easter joy in the midst of *earth's lamentations*. In spite of life's ambiguities. Ambiguity. There is always more than one interpretation to just about all events— It's just the way life is. *Ambi*, means two—as in, there are *at least* “two meanings.”

Groucho Marx's classic joke depends on grammatical ambiguity for its humor:

*Last night I shot an elephant in my pajamas.  
How he got into my pajamas, I'll never know.*

Always, many interpretations are plausible. Uncertainty is built it to the fabric of living. *Perspective* means there is more than one right answer. But it is our choices that make us who we are. Some people are more comfortable insisting that life is explicitly defined and predictable. But we know, it isn't. We don't control our lives, we learn to navigate our circumstances and choose to be guided by certain values and ethical commitments.

I find it fascinating that the author of the Gospel of Mark decided to give the story of Jesus an ambiguous ending. “What?” you say. “Ambiguous? Gospels aren't ambiguous.” Scholars all agree—Mark's telling of story ends here at the 8th verse of the 16th chapter—with an empty tomb and three frightened women. An editor added 12 more verses— much later—perhaps uncomfortable with Mark's ambiguity. Perhaps wanting to make it all “perfectly clear” so he included a post-resurrection appearance, the ascension, and the Great Commission. But Mark wasn't trying to convince anyone of anything. He wrote for a community of people

who were already followers of Jesus, who already called him Lord—who already experienced the power of resurrection in the very creation and life of the Church.

The ambiguous ending of the original Gospel underscores that like the original followers of Jesus, the early Church community had important decisions to make. How were they to shape their community and by what values were they to live their lives? In real time, in the real world, circumstances change, answers are not simple, and decisions matter. And so they wondered—*The tomb was empty. Jesus was not there. What did the three frightened women do? Did they find their voice? Did the disciples listen? Where did they find guidance, direction and strength? What did they do? What are we to do?*

A few years back, I witnessed a moment I think about often. I had arranged for my son, who had just started law school to meet Archbishop Desmond Tutu at a dinner. After the meal, they sat on a sofa together. The Archbishop asked Sam, “Tell me, what do you plan to do with your life?” I held my breath. Then Sam gave him a one word answer. “Civil Rights.”

*I catch the sweet, though far-off hymn  
That hails a new creation.*

In that moment, his life changed. I thought I was hearing God, himself, ask Sam the big question. I didn’t know what he would do. There was no one to answer for him. He had to decide for himself. He didn’t wag his head and say, “I don’t know.” Instead, it was a decisive, revelatory moment.

We all live with complexity and ambiguity in our daily lives—the uncertainty, the vast future before us. The pain and strife, the challenges—We may not know exactly what to do at every turn—but I do know—I am convinced—that over-time—Being part of a *diverse community that seeks to share the love and teachings of Jesus Christ for all people*, does in fact, reshape our relationships and the purpose of our lives, in the midst of *earth’s lamentations*. Being part of a *diverse community that seeks to share the love and teachings of Jesus Christ for all people*, Does, in fact give us an unspeakable joy, true joy—*Catching the sweet, though far-off hymn*—that comes with knowing God, sitting with God, belonging to God,

— pleasing God by becoming who God intends us to be. Being part of *a diverse community that seeks to share the love and teachings of Jesus Christ for all people*, does in fact, make of us a new creation—a resurrected people.

*Through all the tumult and the strife,  
I hear the music ringing,  
It finds an echo in my soul—  
How can I keep from singing?*

“Tell me, what do you plan to do with your life?” There is no one to answer for you. You must decide for yourself. Easter Sunday is a decisive, revelatory moment for each of us— *a hymn that hails a new creation*.

AMEN