

## He has been raised! He is here! *Mark 16:1-8*

April 5, 2015, Norwalk Christian Church, Easter Sunday, Year B

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*“So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to any one, for they were afraid.”*

The End.

You’ve got to be kidding, Mark. That can’t be the end. How unsatisfying. How incomplete. If you read along today in the Bible, instead of on the printed sheet in the bulletin, I know what you’re thinking. That’s not the end! There are 12 more verses!

Indeed, in most of our Bibles, there is more to the story. Keep reading past verse 8, and you will find headings like “the shorter ending of Mark” and “the longer ending of Mark”. Check out the footnotes, and you will read something like, “Most ancient authorities do not include these verses.” What’s going on?

It turns out, early Christians were just as unsatisfied with the end of Mark as we are today. Scholars are pretty much in agreement that about 200 years after Mark wrote his gospel, some monks, copying the Gospel by hand to disperse among churches, came to this ending and thought, “You’ve got to be kidding me.” And so they took it upon themselves to clean things up. They wrote a new ending, gathering pieces from other gospels, and closing off what Mark left so open.

It’s unsettling. But Mark is not kidding. This is the end of his gospel. And it’s even worse if you read it in the original Greek. In the original language, it reads, “They said nothing to nobody. They were afraid, for...”

Yes, you heard that right. Grammarians beware: a double negative AND a sentence, no, an entire book, ending in a preposition! Such grammatical sins are more accepted in Greek than in English, but still. Who would end *this* story *this* way?! “They said nothing to nobody. They were afraid, for...”

It’s like the *Handle with Care* without the Hallelujah chorus. A joke without the punch line. It’s *An Affair to Remember*, except the movie ends with Cary Grant alone on top of the Empire State Building, never learning what happened to Deborah Kerr on the street below.

Where is the earthquake that rolls the stone away? Where is the risen Christ, embracing the women? Where is Jesus, appearing in the upper room, showing the wounds in his hands, feet and side? Where is Jesus on the mountain top, offering final instructions to his disciples before ascending into heaven?

Where is the happy ending? The bow, tied neatly on the greatest story ever told. Christ is risen! Christ is risen, indeed! And they said nothing to nobody. They were afraid, for...

This is no way to run a resurrection. Where is the good news?

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It is Easter, after all! Why the buzz-kill? Our world is hard. There is so much reason to give up hope. We need a triumphal ending, a resurrected Christ embracing us, not three women too scared to speak. We need some good news this morning.

The news is still coming out about what happened in the cockpit of the Germanwings passenger jet, but all evidence points to the co-pilot intentionally running the plane and all 150 people on it into the side of the Alps. In fact, it looks like he accelerated as they were going down. Who would do such a thing?  
We need some good news this morning.

Yesterday, a Somali extremist group issued a warning: “Kenyan cities will run red with blood.” This is after the same extremist group massacred 148 college students on their college campus, many of them Christians. And from the threat issued yesterday, there may be more to come. The attack was said to be retribution for Somali rebels killed by Kenyan troops. But nothing could have earned such a massacre of innocents.

We need some good news this morning.

Pile all that onto the regular bad news of life: heartbreak, cancer, pain, rejection, loss, death. We need some good news. Someone, please, tack on a “happy-ever-after-ending” to this unfinished story. No, this is no way to run a resurrection.

The preacher Tom Long tells the story of a seminary student who, after studying the Gospel of Mark in class, decided to memorize the entire Gospel and perform it live before an audience, difficult, abrupt ending and all.

“At his first performance,” Long tells us, “after he spoke that ambiguous last verse, he stood there awkwardly, shifting from one foot to the other, the audience waiting for more, waiting for closure, waiting for a proper ending. Finally, after several anxious seconds, he said, ‘Amen!’ and made his exit. The relieved audience applauded loudly and appreciatively.”

But it didn’t feel right to student. By giving the audience a satisfying ending, he betrayed the Gospel of Mark’s intention. “So,” Long tells us, “at the next performance, when he reached the final verse he simply paused for a half beat and left the stage in silence.”

When the audience left, you could feel their discomfort and uncertainty. All the talk of the performance centered on their experience of this unsatisfying, incomplete ending.<sup>1</sup>

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We can try to clean up Mark's mess today, but all evidence suggests, this is how he intended his Gospel to end. He wants us to feel discomfort and unease at this story. He intends for the resurrection to jolt us out of our comfort zone, and, perhaps, even terrify.

Maybe it's good for us. It's been a long time since Christ made anyone uncomfortable. As of yesterday, on Facebook Jesus Christ has 11-million, 932-thousand, 448 likes. That's not near as many as Taylor Swift, but still, it's pretty impressive.

It's hard to see how Jesus, who has over 11 million fans on Facebook alone, could ever have been so disruptive, so confrontational, that his own religious leaders and the leaders of Rome thought the best way to deal with him was to kill him.

It's a tragedy, yes. It's heart-breaking. But what do you do? This is the way life goes. It's hard, and depressing. Good guys don't win. Rome wins.

As the women walk to the tomb that morning, they ask themselves, "Who will roll the stone away for us?" The better question may be, "Who wants the stone to be rolled away." Perhaps that's the way they wanted things to stay--the stone, tightly placed on the tomb. *We couldn't anoint Jesus, but we tried. We did our best, and unlike the men, we at least showed up. But the stone was in the way.*

Then they could go home, never having to face Jesus again. They could pick up the pieces of their life, move on. Their hope was buried with him, and that's how they expected it to stay. They learned the lesson the hard way. Don't get your hopes up. Don't believe in the impossible.

And just when they're ready to turn back towards home, they see it. The stone. It's gone. Against their better judgment, they stick their heads inside. He is gone too. And that's when they hear the voice. They didn't even notice he was sitting there.

"Do not be alarmed," the man in white says (for surely they were). "You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you."

And they are terrified! Who wouldn't be?! This is unsettling.

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But did you hear what the "man in white" said? "Go," he says. "Go and tell his disciples." And who are his disciples? Peter, Andrew, James and John...yes. But not just them.

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Long, "Dangling Gospel", <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=3392>

You, me. We are disciples, too. This message is for us.

Go and tell his disciples, he's gone ahead of us. Jesus has gone to Galilee. And where is Galilee? *Well, it's about 120 miles north of Jerusalem...yes.* But it's also where Mark began this whole story of Jesus.

Back in chapter one, when we first met Jesus, it was in Galilee. "Jesus came to Galilee," Mark said at the beginning, "proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.'"

This unsettling ending...it's no ending at all. This is a beginning. A new beginning. And this man in white is inviting us all on a journey, a journey away from empty tombs--for that is no place to find the risen Christ--a journey back into Galilee, back to where it all began. But this time, we go with new eyes--post-resurrection eyes.

This time Galilee looks a lot like our lives, where we work and play and pay taxes and vote and make our home. This is our Galilee. This is our story. And there is Jesus. Alive, here and now. He has been raised! And he is here!

Things are not perfect. Death has been dealt a blow, but death hasn't fallen yet. But we can begin to see it. Glimpses of resurrection, all around. Often it's hidden, just like before, but it's happening.

Here, in our Galilee, eyes are being opened. Here, in our Galilee, people are hearing the good news. Here--right here--demons of oppression and injustice are being cast out. Here, the powers of death and hate are being confronted with the resurrection power of Christ's love. Can you see it?

Sometimes we, like Jesus' first disciples, do not see it, at least not at first. Sometimes we turn our backs on it, betray it and deny it. Sometimes we are terrified into silence. We aren't any more used to a post-resurrection world that the women were on that first Easter. Yet, this is our world.

Here, in our lives, the dead being raised? It's hard to believe, much less proclaim. Yet who among us cannot testify to his presence? Who among us has not felt this resurrection power, alive--in us!

Christ has risen! Christ has risen, indeed. And he is here, hidden, yet alive, his hand healing all the broken places in our world. And our world is hungry for this good news. Will we find our nerve? Are we ready to speak?

The women this morning. We get why they're afraid. We get why they flee, and do not speak. But give them some time. Soon...soon they will find their nerve. Soon they will speak. And when they do...well, let's just say, 2,000 years later, we're still amazed at their good news. Amen.