

Easter Sunday  
Epworth Chapel on the Green  
April 8, 2012  
Rev. Dr. Brook Thelander

Acts 10:34-38  
Psalm 118:14-18  
Colossians 3:1-4  
Mark 16:1-8

If you look at the ending of Mark's Gospel, it doesn't appear to be very good, as far as endings go. The reading in your worship folder today concludes at verse 8, which is where most scholars believe Mark ends his Gospel.

But if you were to look in your Bible, you would notice 12 additional verses that are tacked on to Mark's end to the story. It's almost as if Mark, or someone, felt the need to "fix" the story, or to give it a proper ending.

What I mean by that is that while Mark starts out ok, he seems to botch the ending completely. He starts in the usual fashion -- it's early Sunday morning, it is still dark, the women are going to the tomb to tend to Jesus' body. They arrive to find the stone has been rolled away, they hear that Jesus has been raised, and they are instructed to go and tell others.

But here is where Mark botches things. For then he says: "the women fled the tomb, trembling and bewildered, saying nothing to anyone because they were too frightened to talk."

Not only is this the only resurrection story in the Gospels where Jesus does *not* appear, but the women portrayed in this story come off as failures. A young man dressed in white has greeted them with the words "do not be afraid" (the NLT misfires with "surprised").

If the greeting "do not be afraid," sounds familiar, it should. It is a classic greeting in Scripture, and it always signals that something really good is about to happen. From the prophets of old to the angel Gabriel greeting Mary, every time someone starts a speech by saying, "do not be afraid," it always signals good news.

This young man greets the women by saying, "do not be afraid," and then offers them the best news imaginable: *Jesus is not here, he is risen*. Then he gives them this clear instruction: "Go and give this message to the disciples, including Peter."

But what do they do? They flee the tomb, saying nothing to anyone.

So you have a resurrection story where Jesus does *not* appear, and you have the women in the story who come off looking like failures. It's not a very good ending. Seen in this way, I can understand how some well-intentioned person like a monk or scribe read this in dismay and concluded, "I can fix that," and tacked on some additional text to try to round out the story.

The problem with this is that this material is not found in any of the ancient manuscripts. And it is not consistent with Mark's style. This is why in your

English Bibles there is usually a note to the effect that this material is not found in the early manuscripts.

So what's up here? Why did someone try to "fix" Mark's story? Why did someone try to bring it to a better end?

I don't know. But if you read the whole of Mark's Gospel, you will find a two part pattern that may be at work here in this story. The two part pattern goes something like this: first, throughout Mark's Gospel the people who *should* know what's going on (like the disciples), don't. And second, the people who *do* realize what Jesus is up to can't always be trusted to tell.

For instance, a demon possesses a young man at Gerazene. The demon knows who Jesus is, but can you really count on a demon for testimony?

So there is this apparent bind in Mark's story here. All the people who *should know*, don't. And those who do know can't be counted on for reliable testimony.

But there is one other person who has seen and heard everything Jesus has said and done. One other person who heard Jesus' predictions and then watched as they came true. One additional person who listened to the amazing news at the empty tomb and heard the order to go and tell.

Do you know who that person is?

It's *you*. And me. And all of us who read Mark's Gospel.

Perhaps Mark isn't as bad at ending the story as we might think. Maybe his Gospel concludes in this open-ended way because he wants to place the responsibility for telling others *on our shoulders*.

Maybe Mark hasn't botched the ending after all. He has simply invited *us* into the story, calling on us who come later to pick up where these women left off, and to go and tell that Jesus has been raised and is out ahead of us, just as he promised. In a way, the ending of the story is really the *beginning* of the story.

This is encouraging to me on this Easter Sunday, because our lives are often like this. We are often tempted to "fix" bad endings in our lives. It's understandable, and even reasonable. But it's not always up to us to do this, and many times we *cannot* do it.

And in those times we encounter the God who meets us precisely at the point where things seem the worst. And He meets us there not merely to "fix" things, but to *redeem* them -- and us! God comes to us and turns what looks like an ending into a new beginning. He takes what looks like failure in our lives and offers it back to us as an opportunity.

Part of the message of this day for me is that God will always meet us at the point of our brokenness, in order to do something utterly amazing. We may not always see it, or understand it, but God always shows up.

Let me pose a question to you this morning. Do you believe that the Easter story ends where Mark or the other Gospel writers leave off? Or are you open to the possibility that the story continues into *your* life?

Each of you must answer that for yourself. As you ponder and reflect on that question this morning, I invite you to the Lord's table. Come and receive the grace he offers you. Come and take your place in the story. For on this Easter Day the Lord Jesus is alive, and because of that, so are we!

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.