

Easter Sunday
The Rest of the Story
Mark 16:1-8
Rev. Joy W. Laughridge
April 4, 2021

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didn't happen. It just means that Mark didn't include it for some reason which of course begs the question, why? We can never know for sure why, but we can think about what his intentions might have been, and we can open our hearts to the possibility that even with his untidy ending, Mark means to point his readers to Easter good news and hope. Consider these possibilities with me.

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Mark gives us the chance to identify with the women in their moment of fear, and uncertainty about whether what they are hearing could actually be true and then he doesn't tell the rest of the story, and maybe he doesn't tell the rest of the story because he knew that there wasn't just one ending to the story. By not telling the rest of the story, perhaps it was Mark's way of handing the pen to each of us. For every person who hears the message that Jesus is risen, there is more to the resurrection story. A friend and former colleague married a good Presbyterian in his 20s, but he never made a personal connection with faith or Jesus. After they were married, he attended church with her and began to come around on some things, but the resurrection was something he couldn't accept. And then, one year on the night before Easter, he took the time to sit down and read the resurrection story, and on that night, his spiritual eyes were opened, and he came to believe that it was true. In his case, the more to his story is that God called him to ministry, and he has served the church for over 20 years now. For me, it feels like the rest of the story has been written in those difficult times when I have faced personal struggles, or experienced doubt, or I've observed the painful experiences of others. I believed the story of the resurrection since it was told to me as a child, but it has been in those brushes with the death and sadness in this world that I have embraced that resurrection hope that has pulled me forward rather than sinking into despair.

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First of all, there is the reaction of the women. It is a very human reaction, the kind of reaction that most people would have to hearing that someone had been raised from the dead. Dead people don't come alive again. Like the retiring minister said in his retirement speech, "The first person saved under my preaching has backslidden. The first persons married under my ministry have divorced. But the first person I buried has stayed there." Dead people stay dead, so naturally that was what the women expected to find when they went to the tomb. Mark allows us the space and the opportunity to think about our own reaction to the incredible and unbelievable message that Jesus is alive. Maybe it seems easy to just accept that God is capable of this kind of miracle, and yet, how often do we move through life both expecting and accepting death? I don't mean physical death alone, but all of the painful, heartbreaking things that come into our lives because evil exists in the world. We resign ourselves to the fact that a dying marriage will surely end in divorce; that a disease will surely end in death; that systemic evils like racism and economic injustices will never end; that an addiction or bad habit will always be with us. Like the women who expected to find Jesus's dead body waiting to be anointed, we just kind of expect that painful things will always be part of life and we try to accept it and do the best we can, but then we hear the proclamation that Jesus is risen from the dead which means death *doesn't* have the final word, and it's shocking, and it's hard to believe that it could really be true. If Jesus is alive, then it means that something other than resignation, and acceptance, and despair is possible. If Jesus is truly risen from the dead, then it means that we can do more than accept the reality of death as we experience it in different ways. It means that we can have real hope in the midst of even the most painful and seemingly hopeless situations because Jesus's resurrection means death does not have the final word. Marriages can be and are healed and transformed. Diseases can be and are cured. Addictions can be and are broken. Not every problem is always solved when and how we want, but even when we aren't spared from the sting of death, we can be spared from the finality of it. The resurrected Jesus enables us to stand in a different relationship to our brushes with death, pulled forward by hope rather than dragged down by despair. By leaving us with the women in their moment of fear and shock, Mark gives us the

opportunity to stop and think about the meaning of the message that was proclaimed to them. He doesn't rush right to the resolution, to the moment when their minds were changed, and they began to believe what had seemed impossible up to that point. He gives us the opportunity to have our own expectations turned upside down and then to wrestle with the question, "What if it's true?" And this leads to a second consideration in regard to Mark's strange ending.

Mark gives us the chance to identify with the women in their moment of fear, and uncertainty about whether what they are hearing could actually be true and then he doesn't tell the rest of the story, and maybe he doesn't tell the rest of the story because he knew that there wasn't just one ending to the story. By not telling the rest of the story, perhaps it was Mark's way of handing the pen to each of us. For every person who hears the message that Jesus is risen, there is more to the resurrection story. A friend and former colleague married a good Presbyterian in his 20s, but he never made a personal connection with faith or Jesus. After they were married, he attended church with her and began to come around on some things, but the resurrection was something he couldn't accept. And then, one year on the night before Easter, he took the time to sit down and read the resurrection story, and on that night, his spiritual eyes were opened, and he came to believe that it was true. In his case, the more to his story is that God called him to ministry, and he has served the church for over 20 years now. For me, it feels like the rest of the story has been written in those difficult times when I have faced personal struggles, or experienced doubt, or I've observed the painful experiences of others. I believed the story of the resurrection since it was told to me as a child, but it has been in those brushes with the death and sadness in this world that I have embraced that resurrection hope that has pulled me forward rather than sinking into despair.

So today, as the message is proclaimed to us again that Jesus is Risen from the dead, I wish I had thought about it far enough in advance to have given you all a pen. I would have given you a pen to remind you that the beginning of the story is written, and where Mark left us with a strange ending, you have the chance to add your own rest of the story, and I like how one person said it. "We could write that the idea of a living Lord is just too weird to get our minds around. We could write that it has nothing to do with us. Or we could begin our part of the story with "Come into my life, Jesus. Live not only out there, but also in here. And that would sound a note of joy upon which the rest of our narrative could be built." Amen.