

Christ is Risen! *He is Risen Indeed!* We share the good news of Easter with each other with enthusiasm and great joy. But here's how the lesson ends this morning:

*“So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.”* That's it. That's where the Gospel of Mark ends. Does that seem just a little strange to you? Although the angel has given them an amazing message to share, the women are silent. It's certainly *not* what we expect. It's even a little scandalous. The last scene is left incomplete, abruptly cut short. Scholars have found at least two different endings added to some ancient copies of the Gospel. What we heard today just didn't seem to be a fitting end to the Easter story. It still doesn't.

It is definitely *not* “just another happy ending.” Mark's Gospel tells us that fear is the first reaction of the Easter witnesses. Not *joy* -- no, *fear*. Something *very* new and *totally* unexpected had happened. Death-- they knew about that. Clearly, the followers of Jesus were crushed with sorrow at the death of Jesus. Their lives seemed to crash up against a cruel dead-end. Death, they knew full well. They assumed that the body of Jesus would be there in the grave as they went, sadly, dutifully, to finish the funeral work.

Oh, they were still ready to serve him, even laid out in a grave. They brought spices to the tomb so that they might anoint the hastily-buried body of Jesus. They acted appropriately for a death. After all, we've learned that we must resign ourselves to the mournful need to grieve, to let go and somehow move on.

Death they knew. We *all* know death—it's everywhere in one shape or another; these days, death is screaming bloody murder. Death we know, depressingly well. -- But empty tombs, now that's *different!* Something entirely new--an unsettling scene! First they were afraid. *Of course* they were afraid. Cold gut-gripping fear doesn't just melt quickly into faith. And terrified people do not easily entrust themselves to an unknown future, even if a shining messenger invites them to trust that God is leading them.

The empty tomb meant that God was acting in a new and uncharted way.

*“Maybe God had in fact not failed with this Jesus. Maybe following him has not been a shameful, heart-breaking dead end.”*

Easter morning meant they had to change their way of thinking. They had thought they must give up on their hopes. But “giving up hope” was *not* the change that God was challenging them to make. The empty tomb reveals--and this is as hard for us to grab onto as it was for the women in the tomb that Easter morning—that God, in Jesus, has chosen to act through vulnerable suffering and dying to bring a world of new life. This is *definitely* not just “another happy ending.”

The followers of Jesus had not understood his message. Peter, the Rock, even though he had just made his great confession of faith, rebelled against the crazy notion that Jesus, *God's own Son*, would allow himself to be arrested, and submit to an unjust trial, cruel torture, and a humiliating death hung up on the gallows of the Roman Empire. Peter could not begin to imagine that GOD would do anything like that. *Victory through defeat? Life on the other side of suffering and death?* They all fought that thought. Joy doesn't wash over the witnesses right away. They are terrified and silent at the end of the story.

And of course, it *isn't* the end. That's the great gift of this strange tale that Mark tells us. *It isn't the end.* It's only the end of the *beginning* of the story. We-- you and I-- are needed to complete it. It is up to each generation, each one who receives this message of resurrection, to continue the story.

We *trivialize* Easter if we think it's just another happy ending. Easter is not like watching that classic Jimmy Stewart movie, "*It's a Wonderful Life.*" A humble hero who does good things is rewarded in a heart-warming way by his friends and family, in spite of all his trials. He receives his life back, having seen what would have happened without his presence. It truly makes us feel good about humanity again. But we can walk away from it because the story itself is complete. Would it truly transform anyone's life? Wait two weeks and you *may* have only a faint, fond memory, a flimsy warm-fuzzy.

I like "*It's a Wonderful Life*;" I could watch it and films like "*Casablanca*," or "*The Wizard of Oz*," about once a year, indefinitely. Which, you know, is kind of like how Easter gets treated. It's nice, it's heart-warming; and a person can take it about once a year, indefinitely.

I'm not saying that carrying the story of Easter in our lives will be easy. Pay attention to Mark's "*strange ending that isn't an ending.*" No warm-fuzzies here, just fear that God has pulled us into someone else's on-going story that we don't fully understand and certainly couldn't even pretend to control. But when we put our trust in God, the gift of joy can counter those fears; we can let go and follow, knowing that it is the resurrected Lord of Life who leads us. It isn't a half-hearted thing to follow that leading. We can't roll the credits, turn up the lights, and walk away satisfied until next year.

This strange ending of the story in Mark reminds us that Easter isn't the happy ending to a heart-warming story: Easter is the *hopeful beginning of our happy ending*. Mark starts his Gospel with these words: "The *beginning* of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." And the good news of Jesus goes on--it *hasn't ended*. The promise of Easter can re-cast our past and carry us into God's future. Now *every* Sunday becomes for us a little Easter Sunday. What began in a humble stable in Bethlehem now continues through *us*.

God reaches out to us, no matter where we are. "*Go tell the disciples AND PETER.*" Peter who had denied Jesus three times— Peter who had wept bitterly—"go console Peter," the angel says. Go confront Peter, not with his guilt, but with an invitation to his new forgiven future. Go, and keep on going, because the story isn't done yet.

There is always a temptation to anchor faith firmly in memories of the “*good old days*.” But the messenger from God said, “You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; *he is not here* . . . . But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; *there* you will see him.”

Although Mark doesn’t detail what those fear-filled witnesses did, other accounts tell us that the news did spread. Of course! We are here this morning, after all. More than two thousand years, the news has been spreading; yet still, like those first witnesses, we too can have trouble trusting God’s gift of new life. Yet, Jesus lives and forgives, here in *our* Galilees-- where we work and where we rest, where we dare and where we cower, where we mourn and where we hope. *Where is Galilee for you?*

The Lord promises to meet the disciples in Galilee, where they would have reluctantly returned—assuming, with familiar resignation, that death had had the final word, *again*. But Easter pulls the plug on the ultimate power of death. In that place, in *their* Galilee, they discover that their Resurrected Lord does indeed meet them. They discover that God has a message to share, a vision of new life.

Look for the risen Christ in *your* Galilee, the place where you live and work. God has promised to be there, as we live out the promises made to us in our baptism —“*you are mine, marked with the cross of Christ forever*.” Meet God present among us at the Table, as we listen and learn, as we gather in prayer. Meet God in the lives of those around us, in the opportunities to serve. Easter continues now through God at work in us. “*This is the day which the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it*.” Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia!*