

**Easter Sunday, April 4, 2021, St. Anne's  
Acts 10:34-43; Mark 16:1-8**

I like stories to have happy endings. I don't think I'm alone in this. I'll often avoid going to see a movie if I know it ends tragically. I often like to watch or read mystery stories - not only can you have fun trying to figure out 'who dun it' but you're pretty much assured that by the end the good guys will win, and it will all be neatly and happily concluded. But whether we prefer a happy ending or not, we **do** all generally expect our stories to *have* a beginning, a middle and an end. Which is why people have wrestled with the ending of the gospel of Mark since the time of the early church. As an *ending*, this one is *not* very satisfactory: a white-robed young man gives enigmatic promises and the women scurry away in fear. There's no appearance to the disciples in the upper room, no road to Emmaus, no breakfast on the beach with the risen Jesus. There's only a promise that we'll see him, followed by fear and silence. We half expect some final bombshell to release the tension that has swelled through Mark's telling of the tale. But there's none – it just ... stops. In fact, although you can't tell from the English *translation*, in the original Greek, Mark's gospel actually ends in the middle of a sentence. The whole story is left *hanging* with a kind of implied dot, dot, dot. While the oldest and best of the gospel manuscripts end this way, some members of the early church obviously felt it needed a more satisfactory ending. So there are two alternative endings that were added later - called imaginatively enough, the shorter ending and the longer ending - and one or the other of these are found on *some*, but not all, old manuscripts. Modern bible translation will often have *both* additional endings and you get to pick the one you want.

But despite my preference for happy endings, I actually *like* the ending of Mark's gospel as it originally was, without any added neat and tidy conclusion. A

conventional happy ending comforts us by its very *conclusiveness*. What was started is finished. We're left feeling satisfied and reassured about the order of things. The world is a reliable place after all - dramas begin and conflicts arise, but it's all resolved in the final scene! We can be happy as the curtain falls.

But, tempting as it **is** to want a conventional happy ending, perhaps there's a good reason why Mark didn't give us one. For one thing Mark was writing for people who were *already* believers. He wasn't trying to *convince* them Jesus was resurrected - they already *knew* that. And for another, most scholars agree that Mark was writing for a congregation that was suffering some form of persecution. Mark was writing during the reign of *Nero* - one of the greatest persecutors of Christians in ancient times. It was under *his* reign that church tradition says both Peter *and* Paul were executed. Many of Mark's readers were probably either facing this same possibility themselves, or had people they cared about who *were*. So they don't need a history lesson about the resurrection. They need the assurance that Jesus is right there with them in the midst of **their** troubles.

The question on *their* minds is "Where is Jesus in the midst of *our* trials and suffering and maybe death?" So, while a happy ending is a satisfying conclusion to a *story* - the real world we live in isn't a story. In a **story**, the characters can live happily ever after. But, in the real world it doesn't work that way - even once there's a conclusion to one aspect of our life story, life still goes on. And there are still dirty dishes, bills to pay, ornery bosses and people who need to be looked after. Alleluia! Jesus **is** indeed raised from the dead ... but **Nero** is still emperor, and the neighbours may turn us in, bringing persecution down on our heads. And so, Mark refuses to tie the loose ends of his gospel into a 'tidy bow' of fleeting consolations.

What Mark *does* do is fill his gospel with predictions that come true. Mark assures us *over and over* that Jesus' word can be **trusted**. Jesus tells the disciples they'll find a colt for the triumphant entry into Jerusalem - and they do. He tells them how they'll find the upper room for the Passover supper - and it happens just as he says. He curses a fig tree and it withers. At dinner he tells them one of them will betray him, and he does. He tells them they will all desert him, and they do. That Peter will deny him and he does. Jesus tells them he's going to suffer and die, and *it happens*.

**And** he tells the disciples "after I am *raised up*, I will go before you to Galilee." And at the tomb the young man says "He is going ahead of you to Galilee; *there* you will see him." At the end of his gospel, Mark brings us back to our own responsibility in the world. Instead of comforting us with accounts of the risen **Jesus**, Mark offers us a challenge - to go to Galilee and meet the risen Lord.

Now, to **us** 'going to Galilee' sounds distant and special. *But* we need to remember that for those original disciples *Galilee* isn't some special, sanctified place in a distant, special sanctified land. *Jesus* lived and worked in Galilee. That's where most of his ministry was done. That's where his *disciples* were *from*. They were Galileans. Galilee was Jesus' and the disciples' 'backyard'. For them, **Galilee** was where their people and the common, everyday encounters of life were to be found. My hunch is that after the disciples ran away, they would have gone home - home to Galilee. So, before they even *get* home, *Jesus* is already there waiting for them! The place they will encounter the risen Jesus is at *home* - perhaps, we might say, in the ordinary stuff of life. The disciples may have failed Jesus, but *he's* going to keep his promises to *them*.

In that hanging, open ending Mark assures us that the story is **not over**. Jesus is not just resurrected and gone to be with God. Jesus is still *with us*. Jesus goes ahead of us and is already to be found where *we are*. And even if **we've** failed Jesus, Jesus will **not** fail **us**.

In his open ending Mark assures us that we too are part of the resurrection story. The story continues! It continues in **us** *whenever* we enter our *own* Galilee, our own everyday life, expecting and ready to meet Christ there. Mark is offering us a *challenge*, along with the Good News. Jesus wasn't resurrected just so he could give us some vague comfort about life after death. He brought us eternal life so that *we* can boldly forge forward *whatever* the road in front of us looks like. Forge forward in hope, **trusting** God.

Of course the story **doesn't** end with the women running away and telling *no one*. It *can't* end there— or **we** wouldn't be celebrating Easter. And Mark *knows* that. In fact Mark hinted at the truth in his very first verse when he writes, "The *beginning* of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God."

The Gospel of Mark doesn't have an *ending* because he wants us to understand that the story **isn't over**. It's still unfolding and it will *continue* to unfold until the end of time. And St. Anne's is **part** of the story, just as Mark's little community was. Each of **us** is *part* of the story. No matter what we face. No matter whether, or how, we *fail*. Jesus **is** *waiting* for us. The gospel continues in *our* life and story - if only we're *willing* to be part of it. Jesus' death and resurrection 2000 years ago isn't the **end** of the story – it's the **beginning**. He's waiting for us in *our* Galilee. In *our* life, here, now in 2021! So, let's go meet him!