

**The Resurrection of Our Lord, March 31, 2024**  
Mark 16:1-8

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Alleluia, Christ is risen! (Christ is risen indeed, Alleluia!)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you in the name of Jesus Christ.

“They went out and fled from the tomb, ... and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.” That’s how Mark ends his Gospel account. If you look in almost any Bible, you will see that they will invariably include more verses after this about Jesus meeting up with the disciples. Depending on the Bible you look at, it may or may not tell you that those extra verses are not the in oldest manuscripts, and that biblical scholars consider them to have been added later. Because this ending with the women keeping silent could not have been how Mark meant to end Jesus’s story – could it? Why wouldn’t Mark tell us about the disciples meeting up with Jesus up in Galilee like Matthew does, or about the Emmaus road appearance in Luke, or Mary Magdalene seeing Jesus in the garden in John, and the Sunday meet-ups with the disciples in the locked room? Maybe Marks ending just got lost.

But what if Mark actually meant to end the story this way? What if he was trying to get a reaction out of his audience? Last night at the Easter Vigil we read another story with an unusual ending, an ending that seems like it’s not an ending. It’s the story of Jonah. In the first part of the story that we didn’t read, God tells Jonah to go to Nineveh and announce that God is going to destroy their city. Jonah doesn’t want to do this, and tries to run away from God. Then there’s the storm and the big fish that give Jonah a do over, and that’s where we picked it up last night. Jonah delivers God’s message and the people of Nineveh repent – every last one of them – and God changes God’s mind. God decides *not* to destroy their city. That could be the end of the story, if the story were really about Nineveh. But it’s not. It’s really about Jonah. When God changes God’s mind and has mercy on Nineveh, Jonah throws a fit. “I *knew* it,” Jonah says. “I *knew* that you would have mercy on them and *that’s* why I didn’t want to be your messenger.” Nineveh, you see, was the sworn enemy of Jonah’s people, who hundreds of years earlier had conquered and wiped out the ten northern tribes of Israel. The story ends with God asking Jonah a question: “Should I *not* be concerned about all those people?” It’s a question that goes unanswered. That’s the end of the book, and we don’t get to know how Jonah responds, or if he responds. *God* changes God’s mind about these enemies. But does *Jonah*? We don’t know. Because tidying up the ending would undermine the purpose of telling the story in the first place. Because God’s question to Jonah is really a question to us. We’re meant to ask ourselves whether we, who have experienced God’s mercy on us, would deny God’s mercy to others. The expected answer is, “No, I’m not going to be a petty, selfish jerk like Jonah. God has been merciful to me, and it’s not right to deny God’s mercy to others.”

The ending to Mark’s Gospel works in a similar way. We are meant to identify with the followers of Jesus in this story – the disciples and the women. We’re meant to see ourselves in the ones Jesus called, who accompanied him on his mission of announcing God’s new way of ruling the world, his mission of healing, forgiving, and most importantly, of destroying the powers of sin, death, and evil by his death and resurrection. All throughout Mark’s Gospel, as Jesus’ heals, forgives, and combats the forces of evil, people are wanting to tell others the good news: Look! God is finally answering our prayers. God is finally taking back control of the world. (They are, after all, sick of being occupied and brutalized by the Romans.) But Jesus says no. Don’t say anything. Not yet. Wait until you know the whole story. Now, with today’s reading, the women know the whole story. God’s reign in Jesus comes about through a battle

against all the forces that defy and draw us away from God, and Jesus wins this battle, strangely and paradoxically, by enduring the full brunt of their assaults, suffering, pain, humiliation, and yes even death itself, and emerging victorious. “Don’t tell anyone about all these things,” Jesus had told them, “until I am risen from the dead.” Now they are confronted with an empty tomb and a message of Jesus’ resurrection, and they are now finally invited to go and tell. If Jonah is the funniest book in the Bible (and I think it is,) Mark might be the second funniest. All through the story Jesus has been telling them to keep quiet. Don’t tell anyone, not yet. Wait for it... But people go and tell anyway. They can’t keep quiet. Now it’s finally time. They’ve got the green light. “*Now* go and tell.” And they don’t. It’s funny – hilarious even, if you appreciate irony. And this ironic ending is meant to get you worked up. Now is the time for audience participation. “No! That’s not how it’s supposed to end! Remember what Jesus said? Now is the time! He is risen! Go and tell!”

Of all the endings to the Gospels, Mark’s is most like our own experience of Jesus’ resurrection. We have the news – the rumor, the promise – but Jesus does not appear to us in the flesh as he appeared to the women and the disciples in the other Gospels. We are like Thomas in next week’s Gospel reading from John, who wasn’t there when Jesus appeared to the other disciples. We have only the news, the witness of others, and Jesus’ promise that he will meet us.

And meet us he does. Back at the beginning of the church year, as we began our reading of Mark’s Gospel, I talked about how the ending sends us back to the beginning of the story to read through the Gospel once again with new eyes, now seeing ourselves not so much in the disciples as in Jesus himself. This is what we do as we gather each Sunday around word and sacrament. What Jesus does in the Gospel is what we the body of Christ are being formed to do: care for those who suffer, announce God’s love and forgiveness, and bear witness with our lives to the way of the cross as the way to life that really is life.

The other way this happens in our gatherings is in our celebration of Holy Communion, which is its own kind of appearance of Jesus. The body and blood of Christ, we claim, are truly present for us here, in, with, and under the elements of bread and wine, to work in us faith to trust the promise of God’s saving love. Jesus is truly present in this meal, just as Jesus was truly risen when the women encountered his empty tomb, even before they believed it or knew what to do with that reality. It is a presence, a real presence, that makes itself known by God’s gift of faith.

The resurrection isn’t the end of the story in any of the Gospels, but this is perhaps most obvious in Mark. Mark tells us right up front that what he writes – the whole story of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection – is only the *beginning* of the good news about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The story continues in us. We, the church, are now the means of his presence. So, is it not right then, that we, empowered by our baptism and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, would carry on the women’s task of announcing the resurrection and making Christ’s presence known in lives of faith, hope, and love, even and especially when times are hard? It’s a rhetorical question, and I’ll leave you with it. And with one more reminder, that Christ is risen, Alleluia! (Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!)