

Resurrection of Our Lord B
Empty Tomb, Angel's Message, And ...

March 31, 2024
Mark 16:1-8

I can picture the headlines: “Women discover empty tomb, hear the message from an angel, and”

“And what” you wonder. It's not good grammar to end a sentence with the word “and”. It leaves the listener hanging. You're waiting for more. You expect something else to happen after the word “and.”

That's about the way the Gospel of Mark ends. It ends in the middle of a sentence in the Greek. If you look at the end of Mark in your Bibles, there will be footnotes. At least two different groups of people added more words to the end of Mark. They felt that they had to write something after “and”. There is a shorter ending of one verse. There is a longer ending that adds 12 more verses.

Neither of these endings are found in the oldest copies of Mark. It ends with the women saying nothing to anyone, because they were afraid. The Gospel of Mark ends in the middle of a sentence.

Why would he end his writing this way? First of all, we need to realize that Mark is not writing to try and convince unbelieving readers about the reality of Christ and of the resurrection. He is not trying to prove to them that the resurrection happened. Mark is writing to Christians – to people who already believe that Christ was raised from the dead.

In a similar way, I don't need to tell you that the resurrection happened. You know the Easter story. You know that the stone was rolled away. You know that the tomb was empty. You've heard the message: “He has been raised. Go and tell others.” You've come here today to celebrate that event. What more do you need to hear?

A brief look at history: Mark was written about 35 years after the resurrection. At the time it was written, Nero was the Emperor of Rome. He was one of the greatest persecutors of Christians who ever lived. Both Peter and Paul were executed while Nero was in power. He blamed Christians for the great fire that happened in Rome – even though Nero probably started it himself. Christians in Rome were facing persecution and possible death because they believed that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God, the one who was crucified and risen.

At the same time, in Palestine, a war was going on. Some Jews had rebelled against the Roman forces in Palestine. Christians in Palestine could be persecuted and killed by Romans for being Jewish. They could be ostracized by Jewish family members because they were Christians – and refused to fight and kill Roman soldiers.

These believers didn't need a history lesson about the names of the women who find an empty tomb; they needed the assurance that Jesus was right there with them in the midst of their troubles now. They were people who were afraid. They were people who were afraid to tell others about their faith in Jesus Christ. They could be arrested or even killed because of their faith. They wondered what would happen to them if they failed to follow Jesus. What if they denied him? What if they turned away from him? Mark tries to answer their fears.

In this Gospel every one of Jesus' disciples fails Jesus. When Jesus is arrested, it says:

“All his disciples left him and ran away.”¹ Peter follows for a while, but three times he denies that he knows Jesus – and Jesus warned him that he would do this before the cock crowed twice. He should have remembered that after the cock crowed the first time. He didn’t.

There are women who continue to follow Jesus after he is arrested and crucified. They see where the body is laid. They return on Sunday morning to anoint the body; but, as we heard this morning, they, like the men, run away. They flee from the tomb. They say nothing to anyone. The way Mark tells it, at the time of Jesus’ resurrection, there was no one left to follow him. Everyone had left Jesus. All of his followers were failures.

Another theme throughout this gospel is that what Jesus says will happen. Three times he talks about his upcoming suffering, death, and resurrection – and it happened. He tells the disciples about finding a colt when they go into the city – and it happened. Jesus curses the fig tree – and it happened. Jesus tells his disciples to look for a man carrying a water jar who will show them a room where they will eat the Last Supper – and it happened. Jesus proclaims that all of his followers would desert him – and it happened. Jesus told Peter that he would deny him three times before the rooster crowed twice – and it happened.

Over and over again when Jesus predicts or promises something, it happens. Jesus told his disciples, “After I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.”² The young man at the empty tomb tells the women: “Go, tell his disciples, especially Peter, that he is going ahead of you into Galilee. You will see him there, just as he told you.”³ We know that it will happen. Jesus has said it. It will happen. Even if the women say nothing to anyone, Jesus’ words will come true. They will see him in Galilee. Even though all the disciples – both men and women – have all failed Jesus, Jesus will not fail them. They will see him in Galilee.

The promise is given and repeated: The risen Jesus goes ahead of them to Galilee. He gets there ahead of them – even before they arrive. There they will see him. Jesus has said it. It will happen. Even if the women are so afraid that they say nothing to anyone, it will still happen. They must have seen Jesus, because the news of the resurrection spread – and reached us in the 21st century.

Mark gives his readers hope in the midst of the difficult lives. Jesus promises that he will already be in Galilee when they get there. Jesus promises to be with them in the midst of their persecution and sufferings. He has gone through it ahead of them. He was persecuted and suffered. Should Mark’s readers face execution because of their faith – or simply death because of sickness or old age – Jesus promises to be with them. He has gone through death ahead of them – and he was raised from the dead ahead of them. They will follow where he has led the way to a new, resurrected life.

Mark gives his readers hope in the midst of their difficult lives.

Not many of us are facing death because we believe in Jesus. We are seldom persecuted because of our faith. We don’t face suffering because of our faith; but each of you will be going home sometime after this service. The glory of an Easter worship celebration will give way to the drudgery of everyday life back at home. At home there may be dirty dishes, unmade beds, yards or gardens that will need tending, houses that need cleaning; cars that

¹ Mark 14:50

² Mark 14:28

³ Mark 16:7

need washing, food that needs preparing, clothes that need washing, perhaps some tax forms that need completing. In my case, I will be going to a new home full of boxes of our stuff; and walls that need repainting and floors that need recovering. Where is Jesus in the midst of the humdrum and difficulties of our lives? The risen Jesus goes to Galilee ahead of you. Jesus has already gone through whatever we might be going through – and he came out the other side with a new life.

The Gospel of Mark has a definite beginning. The first verse states: “The beginning of the good news about Jesus Christ, God’s Son.”⁴ The gospel of Mark does not have an ending. The good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, does not end at the last verse of the book – it’s an incomplete sentence. The story can’t be over yet. There’s an “and”. We are waiting for more. What comes next?

“And what?” you ask. “And what?” is Mark’s question to you. The gospel of Jesus Christ continues in our lives and through our words.

⁴ Mark 1:1