

Lectionary B Easter Sunday, April 5, 2015
Grace and Peace Lutheran Church, Evansville, IN
Roberta Meyer

Acts 10:34-43
Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24 (24)
1 Corinthians 15:1-11
Mark 16:1-8

IT IS JUST BEGINNING

I don't like movies that have messy endings, ones that leave you hanging or leave me wondering, "What in the world? You can't leave the story end like this!" A recent movie I watched that gave me that feeling was "Gone Girl." I won't any more about the movie because some of you may not have seen it. Let's just say I didn't like the way it ended. It left me feeling uncomfortable.

According to commentator, David Lose, that is how the ending of the Gospel of Mark made some early editors of this Gospel feel. The earliest transcripts of Mark's Gospel end at verse 8a, with the women running away as fast as they could go stunned with amazement and fear. In fact, they were so much in shock they didn't say a word about what they saw in Jesus' tomb to anyone. Did Mark get distracted before he finished his story? Did someone call him away? That happens to me sometimes. I am writing and the phone rings, or Dave asks me a question, and I get distracted and forget what I'm doing. Maybe Mark was in the middle of a thought and didn't get a chance to finish.

Surely Mark didn't mean for his account of Jesus' life to end with women running scared and not saying anything? That couldn't be, because then Jesus' meeting with the disciples couldn't have happened. If those women said nothing to anyone, well, think about it. The news would have just stopped. No one would have known. If it really ended with those women clamming up and running away, where would we be?

If you look at the end Mark in your Bible you will see that there are two versions of the ending of Mark's Gospel. Some early editors tried to put a tidy ending on the story. Maybe they tried to finish it the way Mark meant to.

Or not. What if Mark knew exactly what he was doing? That he wrote this incomplete ending on purpose. That he left the story hanging in this moment of confusion and disappointment for a reason.

But Why?

Well, what is this story about?—death and resurrection. How could a story dealing with dying and rebirthing have a neat and tidy ending? Have we heard this story so often that we have become immune to the absurdity of the events Mark describes here? Imagine, your best friend died—even worse—your best friend was tortured and murdered in a horrible painful way. You were there. You saw him flogged and mocked. You heard him cry out as he hung on that execution apparatus. Your friend dies. You watch them carry his lifeless body to the tomb. You see them roll the stone in front of the opening. His body was sealed in the tomb. For the last

three days you have been in deep mourning. Your mind has just begun to get a grip on what happened. It wasn't a nightmare. It was real. Your friend is dead and you had to deal with that truth. In order to bring some normalcy to your life, you and your companions plan to go to the grave in the morning and pay tribute to your deceased friend.

Can we understand a little, the state of mind these women were in?

They were walking to the grave wondering how in the world they were going to move the stone so they could properly prepare the body. And—the stone is gone! Without time to react to that, they are startled by a guy all dressed in white sitting by the grave. He looks at them and says, “*Don't be afraid. I know you're looking for Jesus the Nazarene, the One they nailed on the cross. He's been raised up; he's here no longer.*”

My mind would have shut down about then. But this person, or figment of their grieving minds, or whatever he was, is still talking to them and saying they should go tell Peter and the others to meet Jesus, their friend who just died, to meet him in Galilee! They were just beginning to get their minds around the fact that he died, now what? No wonder they were scared speechless.

Have you ever had something happen to you, either really, really good, or really, really bad, and you just have stop for a moment and pinch yourself asking, “What just happened? Is this real?” I think this is exactly what Mark wants us to experience with these women on this Easter morning. He wants us to be in the moment participating in the shocking news of Jesus' resurrection as if we were the ones who discovered the empty tomb.

Yes, this is right where Mark wants us. He stops the narration in the heat of the women's gut reaction, inviting us to live in that moment where a new reality soaks into our lives, processing as these women did what Easter means for us personally. Easter morning is the turning point for all creation. These women are the first Easter people. From that moment, we all carry this rebirthing hope, with all the raw feelings that goes with it every day.

How does Easter make a difference when we encounter the trials and tribulations of our lives? How does being an Easter person make a difference as you sit at the bed side of a sick friend or relative? Or find yourself in one of those moments where you need to pinch yourself to process what is happening? What difference does it make when you get bad news, or really good news? How does the reality that this gift of new life is actively happening right now in this very moment make a difference in your life?

Mark wants us to see that this Easter gift Jesus gives us wasn't over at the empty tomb two thousand years ago. No, *It's only just getting started*. Resurrection isn't a conclusion, it's an invitation. And Jesus' triumph over death, sin, and hate is the thing that makes us Easter people, pinching ourselves, processing and living in this reality. Mark's Gospel is all about setting us up to live resurrection lives and continue the story of God's redemption of the world.

Mark tells us right up front that his story isn't meant to leave us with a neat conclusion about the life of Christ long ago. The very first verse of his Gospel is almost as abrupt and awkward as this closing one. Mark doesn't give us the long genealogy of Matthew; the tender story of shepherds, angels, and a mother and her newborn together in a stable as in Luke; or the wonderful hymn to the Word made flesh of John.

No, Mark comes right out and says simply, “*The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.*” It isn’t even a complete sentence. The key thing here is that Mark says straight off that his whole Gospel is *only the beginning of the good news* of what God has done and is still doing for the world through Jesus Christ, death and resurrection is still happening.

This story isn’t over. It’s only the beginning, and we have a part to play. It’s only the beginning, and just like those little butterflies I told the children about, fluttering around, we don’t know where or how we are going to find ourselves in our next moment. But we have resurrected new beautiful wings. The world hasn’t changed, but we are. It’s messy and uncomfortable and downright scary at times. But we carry in us that gift that never goes away. Jesus’ resurrection is the one sure truth in our lives that we can count on. It is the perpetual light that gives us Easter hope wherever we happen to flutter. Easter makes a difference and it is working in us every day. And yes, things are messy, there is no neat ending, yet—that’s because God’s not done yet. The story isn’t over. It’s only the beginning.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!