

Jesus lives and this means something very personal to us. Mark gives us a proclamation and a promise. The resurrection proclamation makes a promise to us. It promises us that this life is not the end. The Apostle Paul reminds us that if only for this life we have hope in Jesus we are to be pitied above all people. The resurrection reminds us that this life is not the end of life. Life goes on. That life will either be spent with Jesus or separated from God because we have rejected Jesus.

The resurrection is that Jesus is Lord. Jesus' resurrection is the proof once and for all that Jesus is who Jesus claimed to be. He is God's only son. Jesus is God. Jesus is Lord.

The resurrection also gives us the promise of resurrection. God is not simply going to separate us from this body and from this world; God is going to transform it all. God is going to recreate God's creation. We too will experience a resurrected body.

The resurrection also has this promise and that is Jesus is alive right now and present through the Holy Spirit to us right now. We do not have to wait to know Jesus. We do not have to wait to experience Jesus. Jesus is alive right now and with us right now. We can have a relationship with Him, right now.

Don't you see, God's story is your story? This is the story that God is writing for you. The story of Jesus is God's invitation to you and me. It is as though God says through Jesus... this is where you belong. This is the story written for you and written with you.

Mark's gospel ends abruptly and in doing so says to us the story is not yet finished. It is simply beginning and you are invited into it. It was the story you were born to live.

So how does this story end? I have always loved this paragraph from John Eldredge in his book Epic where he compares the gospel story to the great literary stories of our time. This is what he writes:

*One day soon we will round the bend in the road, and our dreams will come true. We really will live happily ever after. The long years of exile will be swept away in the joyful tears of our arrival home. Every day when we rise we can tell*

*ourselves, my journey today will bring me closer to home; it may be just around the bend. All we long for, we shall have; all we long to be we will be. All that has hurt us so deeply will be swept away. And then real life begins.*

The resurrection of Jesus is not just another story. It is the story. We have been invited into it through our faith and God's mercy in Christ. The resurrection is truly the never-ending story.



## WE HAVE SEEN JESUS

### The Never Ending Story

Mark 16:1-8

# TRINITY PULPIT



What are your favorite ongoing series? The invention of the DVR, Netflix, and Amazon, among others, has created the entertainment phenomenon of the ongoing series. Every year the television dramas which win awards are these new genres, which are found on many of the pay cable networks or of course PBS. The change in entertainment has provided us the capacity to watch an ongoing story and series. Use too, one had to be present every night at a certain time to follow a series and ongoing story, but no more. Now, we can watch at our convenience and so the popularity of the story that never ends has become the norm.

Whether it is Downtown Abby, House of Cards, 24, Game of Thrones, The Walking Dead or even if it is just your normal daytime drama that has the same stars, that were the stars when you were in college, we enjoy the ongoing story. The same is true, of course, with the success of films. It might be Batman, Harry Potter, James Bond, Mission Impossible or even The Lord of the Rings or Star Wars. We like the stories that keep on going. We like the never-ending stories.

This morning we are here to celebrate the greatest never-ending story. It is the story of Jesus' resurrection and it, unlike every other story, is the story that has stood the test of time. It is the story that has transformed every generation since it was first proclaimed. It is the story that not only has been present and growing for over 2,000 years, it is also the story that has literally re-written history and is re-writing the future as well.

It has been said that our current younger generation is the delete generation. They have grown up knowing that you can hit delete. When you hit delete, of course we think it is really gone when we know that it is not, but we live with the concept that delete really works and you can erase everything. Snapchat and

other apps allow you to take a picture or tell a story, but it only lasts for a few seconds and then it is gone.

There are so many other stories of leaders, teachers, great men and women who have lived and yet, their stories have lasted only a while. Their influence has only been for a while. Their lives are like the ones described in Psalms as lives that are brief, the wind blows over them and the place they were planted are remembered no more.

Yet, the story of Jesus and particular the story of His resurrection is the story that cannot be erased. It is the story that has been attacked and one that every generation has also tried to silence and erase and yet, here we are again this Easter morning to celebrate the story that will not go away. The story that will not go quietly into history. The story that is the never-ending story.

Mark is the oldest of the gospels and it in that brief gospel, Mark's account of the resurrection is like the rest of his book. It is too the point and it is a brief description. Mark tells us that when the Sabbath day was over, meaning Saturday, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so they might anoint the body of Jesus. This was the practice of the Jewish people at the time of death. Now the other gospels tell us the Joseph of Aramethea had also used spices on the body of Jesus at His burial. The point was not really embalmment, but the odor of decay. It was simply a loving act. Whether the women were unaware of Joseph's previous actions or whether out of loyalty and love, they just wanted to participate in this practice, they bought their spices and they went to the tomb.

We know they knew where the tomb was located, because chapter 15 ends telling us they saw where He was laid. They make their way to the tomb that morning and the discussion is not resurrection. The discussion is not even



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what Jesus had taught. Their discussion is not about the possibilities of life eternal. The discussion is very practical. The discussion is who is going to roll away the stone. Mark writes it as they kept asking each other who is going to roll the stone away from the tomb. The idea is that with each step they are in this discussion. Who is going to help us? How are we going to get this done?

Yet, when they arrived they looked up they saw that the stone, which was very large, was already rolled away. They entered the tomb and instead of seeing Jesus' body, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side and they were alarmed. Surprised, afraid and taken back.

The young man speaks. "Don't be afraid, you are looking for Jesus the Nazarene who was crucified. He is risen. He is not here. See the place where they laid him."

The young man dressed in white, we are to assume, was the angel as described in the other gospel. His comment is interesting. You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene. Jesus the human. It is a way of proclaiming that Jesus was a real person who had a birth and history. This human Jesus had been crucified. He had died. He did not just appear to die. He had been put to death. The very human Jesus with a birth and history had also a death. Yet, He had risen. Look for yourself. He is not here.

The angel continues his proclamation. Now, they are to go and tell the disciples to go to Galilee and there Jesus would meet them. Then Mark has what is a strange verse 8. Trembling and bewildered the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone because they were afraid. Now this does not mean they did not tell the disciples, for we know the other gospels tell us they do just that. We can read it as though they did not tell anything to others, until they went to where the disciples were staying.

If your Bible is like mine, then what you have is a note that says the earliest manuscripts and other ancient witnesses do not contain the rest of the Mark account. In other words, as far as we can tell, Mark's writing and Mark's gospel ends right there. Verse 8 is the end. It is an abrupt ending. It does seem very incomplete. Jesus is missing, the angels say He is risen, the disciples are to meet Him in Galilee and that is the end of the story. Now we know from the other gospels that there are other encounters with Jesus after the resurrection, but Mark's gospel ends with this open-ended conclusion.

It is such an abrupt ending that scribes and followers of Jesus add what we have as verses 9-20. They too thought

it ended too abruptly. It does not make the addition less true. In fact, it is just an addition to Mark's writing to give the rest of the story. However, the question still remains why Mark chose to end his writing of the gospel as he did.

There are several reasons, which have been suggested. One is that we simply might not have Mark's ending. It could be that Mark had more, but in some way it has been lost. We can never really know. We, of course, know from the other gospels there are many stories of Jesus being in their midst and Jesus having personal and corporate encounters with the 12 and others. Yet, Mark's gospel ends with this open conclusion. The women hear the proclamation, the tomb is empty, there is a promise to see Jesus again and they leave trembling and bewildered.

As I have thought about Mark's ending, this Easter season, I have concluded that I am glad there is an ending to the gospel like Mark's. I like that there is one of the gospels where the story is not neatly wrapped up and finished. I like that one of the gospels ends with just a proclamation and a promise. I like that because that is more closely to our lives. Our lives are not neatly wrapped up everyday. Our lives are lived everyday with God's proclamations and promises.

As we gather this Easter morning, let me suggest two important points about Mark's abrupt ending. First, Mark invites us to truly find faith in the proclamation of the resurrection. Since the first day of the resurrection there have been theories about what happened. Matthew tells us that when the guards reported to the Chief Priests what had happened, they were paid to lie and say that the disciples had stolen the body of Jesus. Matthew comments that this story, this lie, has been circulated among the Jews to this very day. Meaning that there has always been a theory about what happened to the body of Jesus.

We, of course, do not have to even hear that story. All we have to do is watch documentaries that put forth many different theories about what happened to Jesus' body. There are some that simply say it is still there. There are some who still say it was stolen and the disciples concocted this whole story of resurrection. Then, of course, there are those of us who have said by faith, we believe that Jesus lives.

N.T. Wright, the world-renowned Biblical Scholar, outlines various reasons that the only conclusion we can have is that the story is true.

First, he suggests that the thought of resurrection is such a new story that no one would have thought to invent

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this story. In Jesus' day, the teaching of Plato had greatly influenced culture. The universities and others were teaching the concept of life after death. But the concept of life after death was not resurrection. It was more separation from the body and soul. The soul lives, but the body dies. In Jewish life, the concept of anything after death was still in construction. The Sadducees did not believe in life after death and the Pharisees did. There were those who believed in resurrection, but that was an end time event. Now they had experienced resurrection in the midst of time. This experience was not with a ghost or spirit, but rather with a person in a recognizable and yet transformed body. It was so different that they have a hard time describing it. Yet, that is exactly what lends to its authenticity. It is an experience that has never happened before and thus could have not been derived.

Second, Wright suggests that the fact the gospels are not corroborated actually point not to them being false, but true. The gospels are not the result of four writers getting together and making sure their facts all line up. In fact, what we find in the gospels are four very different witnesses to an event and experience. Yet, here is what is true throughout. Jesus body is missing, there is proclamation that Jesus is alive and there are appearances and encounters with Jesus. The general story and proclamation is the same and yet the story is told differently. This is not proof of falsehood, but rather just the opposite.

Third, it is the story first told by women. Women had very little authority in Jesus' day. They were considered unreliable witnesses. Yet, the gospel accounts are clear that the first witnesses to the resurrection are the women. Matthew says the women run into Jesus when they leave the tomb. John has this incredible moment when Jesus and Mary Magdalene have the encounter in the garden of tombs. It seems that the women are not only the first to hear the news, but also the first to see the risen Christ. Yet, their testimony would not be valid. In fact, this is why some disciples do not believe them. We are told they respond by saying it sounds like what we would call "an old wives tale." If you make up a story you don't use women to tell it. Adding more proof to its authenticity.

Fourth, there are the simple historical accounts of what happened to these people who encountered the resurrected Jesus. They spent their lives, went to their martyred deaths, believing what they had witnessed. We do not find one of them shrinking away. We do

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not find one of them saying it is not true after they had experienced it. They faced horrible deaths themselves and yet, went to their deaths with this proclamation on their lips.

This week we were again reminded that those who believe in Jesus know it to be true and it makes the difference between life and death. As young Christian men and women were shot to death by Islamic Terrorist in Kenya we were again reminded that those who believe, those who know the resurrected one... do not shrink away.

The only logical conclusion one can come to is that event of the resurrection happened. It is so out of context, out of the ordinary, out of the probable or the possibilities of humanity that it changed everyone who experienced Jesus.

Yet Mark's gospel calls us to more. It calls us to faith without all the "proof." We are called to be among the blessed ones, as Jesus describes us in that upper room when he says to Thomas you have believed because you have seen. Blessed are those who believe and have not seen.

There comes a time for each of us that we must move beyond the demand for proof and simply say "Lord I believe and help me with my unbelief."

It was the great C.S. Lewis in his movement from atheism to faith in Jesus who came to the questioning place and simply asked of his lack of belief "what if I am wrong and the story of Jesus is true?" What if I am wrong and this is right? Mark leaves us in the place where we really are. We live each day by faith. We live with a proclamation of the resurrection and the promise that we will see Jesus just as He has promised us.

Mark's gospel also invites us into the story. It is as though Mark's abrupt ending seems to say... this is not the end of story, but just the beginning. It is as though Mark's gospel reminds us... God is still writing the resurrection story and we are a part of that story. The truth is we have always been in the center of Jesus' story. For God so love the world that He sent His one and only Son into this world, that by believing in Jesus we might have everlasting life. We have been the center of God's story since creation and we remain the center of the story. Jesus came for us and we are included with Jesus in the story of the resurrection.