

A Sermon for Easter Day 2015
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Alleluia! Christ is risen!

Mark was the first person that we know of to write down the story of Jesus' life. In fact, it is from the beginning of Mark's account of Jesus' life that we get the name for these kinds of writings: "The beginning of the good news about Jesus Christ" is how the book of Mark begins, and "Good News," or "Gospel," which means the same thing, is what we call such writings.

But today we read from the end of Mark's good news story. Or at least one of the ends. I know you were wondering why I stopped before the couple of sentences on your bulletin inserts. But Mark's gospel, it turns out, has three different endings.

The oldest versions that we have don't have those last two which seem to have been added in the fifth century. Another, longer ending included in most modern Bibles, which tells more about the risen Jesus, the disciples, and the spreading of the good news to build up the church, was circulating by the third century.

But think about the ending of the story the way Mark told it to his community in the first century, the way I just read it: "So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid."

That's the ending of the good news about Jesus Christ the way early Christians in Mark's community heard it as they were building up the church. "They said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid."

No wonder later Christians wanted to add alternative endings.

But I rather like Mark's original ending. If Mark's Gospel had been found in a cave in modern times, it would certainly have served to explain why this cult following of this ancient teacher had died out. Kind of like all of those disasters in the book of Job where the messenger ends his account by saying "and I alone am left to tell the tale. But that's not the way it happened, is it? Obviously the two Marys and Salome didn't stay silent for long.

And when Mark's version of the life of Jesus was first written, it was read out to a group of people who knew for certain that wasn't the end of the story because they themselves were the rest of the story. The end of the good news about Jesus Christ was not that Mary and Mary and Salome said nothing to anyone because they were afraid, but that the good news somehow reached the ears of the members of Mark's community, and that they heard it and were changed by it, and were there. They knew the end of the story because they were the end of the story. It was the beginning of the story, which most of them were not there to witness, that people needed to hear.

And what did they take away from that story? Basically this: that everybody had been pretty much wrong about just about everything. Jesus friends had been wrong in expecting a militant Messiah to overthrow the Roman Empire by force. They had been wrong in thinking that everything was over when Jesus died. They had been wrong being afraid. And they had been wrong in saying nothing.

More importantly, they had been wrong about God. They had been wrong in fearing God's judgment and condemnation. They had been wrong in thinking that God's economy worked like the human economy where everything came at a price. They had been wrong in thinking death was the worst thing that could happen to Jesus or to themselves.

And the proof that they had been wrong was all around them. They only had to look to one another to see that the empty tomb and the strange tale the stranger told them that Jesus was alive and would meet them soon really meant that the truth – the extraordinary, glorious, life-changing truth – was that the world had been so changed by Jesus' life and death and resurrection that they – strangers, people from across unbridgeable divides of religion, social class, gender, language and culture were now gathered together as one family with a common purpose, working together to achieve a common goal. And so, discovering that they had been wrong, they changed.

The followers of Jesus, living together in mutual support, sharing their resources so that everyone had enough, growing daily by spreading the good news of God's love and Jesus' self-giving, had not only heard the good news, they had become the good news.

So look around you. The never-ending story of Jesus resurrection is right here, right now. We gather here to retell the story, but in gathering we also embody the word that we tell. And we remind ourselves that we were also wrong about everything – wrong to be afraid, wrong to judge, wrong to separate ourselves from one another by unkindness, lack of compassion, selfishness, and enmity.

We were wrong, but we have been changed by what we have heard and experienced, and we are here. Just as Mark's community and so many of our sisters and brothers who have come before us have done, we gather here to be the good news – to greet one another with peace, compassion, kindness and love, and then to take the good news of the resurrected life that we have been called to out into the world, and to be the good news, to be peace love and kindness and compassion and generosity for the whole world.

Jesus is not in the tomb. Jesus could not possibly be in the tomb because Jesus is here. Our Christ is risen, and we are risen with him, and we need not be afraid of anything, and we need not, we must not refuse to tell the story to anyone. We are

the good news – we are the visible sign of Jesus’ resurrection in the world – and
we must tell our story in word and action even as we proclaim:

Alleluia! Christ is risen!