



**JESUS CHRIST HAS RISEN,
AND RESURRECTED OUR HOPE, OUR LIVES, FOR...**
Colossians 3:1-4; Mark 16:1-8
April 12, 2020
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"When is the ending not the end? When a dead man rises from the tomb – and when a gospel ends in the middle of a sentence."

- Dr. Lamar Williamson,
Emeritus Professor of Religion,
Union Seminary Richmond

These words nicely sum up the gargantuan tension and confusion that ends the gospel of Mark. In fact, this ending was so problematic for people in the early centuries of the church that they decided to tack on a "better" one.

Open your Bible to the end of Mark. There are two endings added to Mark's writings centuries later. One is a few sentences that puts a nice bow on the gospel by referring to the imperishable salvation from Christ. The other is an additional eight verses which includes multiple appearances of the resurrected Christ. However, Mark's original ending contains no such eyewitness accounts.

Bruce Metzger, the chief editor of the NRSV Bible, points out that two prominent figures in the fourth century (Jerome and Eusebius) attest these endings were absent from almost all Greek copies and two in the third (Clement and Origen) showed no knowledge of these endings whatsoever.

Mark ended this gospel with a dangling unresolved word, "for". A word used throughout scripture to connote that there is more to be said. A word-by-word translation of the Greek in the last verse would read,

"and-having gone out-they fled-from-the-tomb-had seized-for-them-trembling-and-amazement-and-to none-nothing-they spoke-they were afraid-for..."

They were afraid for . . . what? This ending is like a television series that you have watched for seven seasons. Then, as you are waiting for the final episode, it gets cancelled! It is infuriating.

It is also like an unresolved chord in music. One person described the tension and challenges that creates,

Resolution is one function that gives songs a sense of purpose and meaning. You can often hear when a chord sounds "unresolved", because it holds a lot of tension . . . Similarly, you should be able to hear when a progression sounds resolved, because of the satisfying, relaxed feel you get from bringing the journey to an end.

A relaxed feeling is the furthest thing from Mark's ending! In fact, disciples fleeing in terror and amazement is no ending at all! At least not one that resolves tension!

Three women have arrived at the tomb to find the stone rolled back. They encounter a person we presume to be an angel. This alarms them, but they hold their ground. It is not until they are informed that Jesus has risen that they were shocked to their core.

I don't know about you, but when I watch my favorite television shows these days and see people not keeping social distance, I catch myself wanting to yell at them through the TV, "Spread out!" Very quickly, the virus has crept down into a deeper place than my conscious thoughts and I just react.

That is how it was in the time of the disciples. This event was so jarring that they didn't have time to process the information. They trembled and shook; they were mesmerized into a trancelike state and then they RAN.

They tried desperately to get away. We cannot process that now, so many years later, that people would flee this moment. But the other gospels have some strange resurrection moments of their own. Mary sits next to Jesus, but does not recognize him. Disciples walk and talk with him extensively but

don't know it is him even though they are talking all about him.

There is something about the resurrected Jesus that is too much for our meager brains to comprehend. Perhaps it's like trying to teach quantum mechanics to your dog or breaking the robot's brain in the show 1960's show *Lost in Space*, "Does not compute! Does not compute!" (YouTube it!)

These followers of Christ were so accustomed to a world which failed them that the very idea of a real deliverance and redemption made them quake – because it meant it was something they had never seen before. The resurrected Jesus shows us that true change, that something truly new, can happen. But we don't want it. Not really.

We don't want Jesus to change our life. We simply want him to fix the parts that are broken so that we can keep living our old life, only better.

Fix my finances, so I don't have to worry.
Fix my relationships with my parents
or my teenagers,
so we don't yell all the time
but don't change my life,
don't meddle God.

It's like this time of the virus. We each have our breaking point.

Take away my eating out, but not my takeout.
Take away my commute to work (please!) but
not my toilet paper.
Take away my endless meetings, but not my
paycheck.
Don't change my life, Lord, just tweak it.

But the resurrection meant everything was different – and different scares us. But, just like in an ice-storm, you must turn into the skid to make it through, so to it is with the resurrection.

Have courage to meet this resurrected Christ head on and your life won't simply be tweaked but transformed into something more wonderful,

powerful, sorrowful, joyful, and glorious than we could ever imagine.

The good news is that we don't have to be the ones to force ourselves to change. This change happens not by the will of the flesh but by the Spirit of God, that is what baptism represents. It comes through God's grace. Imagine you have some deep infection in your bone, and you need surgery. You can't do it. You need someone else to do it for you. Your part is to have the courage to go under the surgeon's knife. She will do the rest.

Our role is to put our life in the hands of the one who has conquered the grave, risen from the dead.

During this time of the Coronavirus, our lives have completely changed in these few weeks. Our normal routines have been obliterated. Our ability to conduct our life as we see fit is gone.

How do you see all the emptiness around you?
the empty streets,
the empty businesses,
the empty bank accounts
and not see terror but hope?
How can you look into those places,
like the empty tomb, and not flee in fear?
Do we see a place void of life?
If we do then the story has ended, with terror.

But remember it was an empty tomb
that was the sign of our risen Lord.
The truth of the gospel
was first found by three women
when they found emptiness.

If you have the courage
and the vision
for this God of life
to work through you
especially in this time
then the story will continue to bring hope.

Mark leaves us dangling because the story is unfinished. The story does not end in first century

Palestine. It keeps being told and coming to life each time someone meets the risen Lord.

In Mark's gospel there is no appearance of the resurrected Jesus,

For he is meant to appear in each one of us,
not in some book
but in your life.

It is not about the proof of eyewitnesses,
(that was never what the Bible was about)
but to lead you,
to lead you to Christ
and so, the story does not have an ending
for it does not come to completion out there
but in here,
as you see a place just as ripe
for sharing love,
for proclaiming hope,
for offering grace,
for celebrating the resurrection of our Lord!

Our job is to write our own ending to this gospel with our lives. That is why it is unfinished! People did it centuries ago and you can now find those endings in your Bible.

Think about the new endings to this gospel we have experienced these past few weeks,

"So, they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, they were afraid..."

The risen Christ resurrected our hope, our lives, for inspired by Christ's sacrifice and God's power to bring life from death, people's hearts swelled with love during the time of Coronavirus.

. . . for a sports apparel manufacturer in Philadelphia transformed their equipment to make and donate hospital gowns, while a football team lent their plane to donate one million face masks

. . . for a Michigan high school's robotics team used 3D printers to make face shields for physicians

. . . for medical workers that came out of retirement all around the country to risk their own lives that others might live.

. . . for one family to make a hundred palm crosses, brought them to the Eden Terrace nursing home, that swelled the hearts of the residents there, and they felt Christ's love!

. . . for the hearts of children in Spartanburg were inspired to memorize the Word of God, to record it, sharing it with everyone, and lifting the spirits of all who heard them.

. . . for teachers at First Presbyterian Weekday School loved their children so much, they got creative and created a parking lot parade so they could wave to their kids and let them know they loved them!

Children – and everyone – this where your part comes in. Write a new ending to the gospel of Mark! Post it on Facebook it, YouTube! Share it! I want you to do it right now!

Jesus Christ has risen, and resurrected our hope, our lives, for. . .

How will the story finish in your life? Amen.