

Mark 16:1-8 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

The Resurrection of Jesus

16 When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. ²And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. ³They had been saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" ⁴When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. ⁵As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. ⁶But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. ⁷But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you." ⁸So 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.^[a]

THE SHORTER ENDING OF MARK

[[And all that had been commanded them they told briefly to those around Peter. And afterward Jesus himself sent out through them, from east to west, the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation.^[b]]]

Isaiah 25:6-9 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

⁶On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples
a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines,
of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear.

⁷And he will destroy on this mountain
the shroud that is cast over all peoples,
the sheet that is spread over all nations;

⁸ he will swallow up death forever.

Then the Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from all faces,
and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth,
for the LORD has spoken.

⁹It will be said on that day,
Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us.
This is the LORD for whom we have waited;
let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.

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Easter/Putting Us Back Together

Mark 16:1-8; Isaiah 25:6-9

Kerra Becker English

Mark's gospel ends rather abruptly. The empty tomb is pretty much all we get. The resurrected Jesus doesn't mysteriously appear to the disciples on the road and walk with them to Emmaus. He doesn't show up on the beach after they've been fishing to cook them a nice breakfast. He doesn't make a grand scene-enhancing proclamation like, "Lo, I will be with you always, even until the end of the age." Mark doesn't seem to have much flair for an ending. He's not anxious about our need to have the story be complete with a proof that Jesus appeared to actual people after he was known to be dead. Mark wasn't writing a screen play, or if he was, it seems more like he's tossing the plot to us so we can improvise the next few acts.

In fact, some later biblical copy-editors were so dissatisfied with Mark's ending that they added a few extra verses. To replicate the ongoing frustration Mark describes Jesus as having with his followers, this post-resurrection Jesus comes back with attitude. He chides his disciples for their lack of faith, and disbelief, and stubbornness. Then Jesus tells them that those who believe will be saved. And you will know that they have been saved by the signs they demonstrate: they will cast out demons, speak in tongues, pick up deadly snakes or drink poison without being harmed, and they might be able to cure a few sick people.

So I think I'll stick with the ending at verse eight. I'm not ready to prove myself by picking up some snakes or drinking poison just yet.

You've already heard what happens according to Mark. Mary goes to the tomb. No Jesus. A character dressed all in white tells her that he's risen. AND, he says, you can tell people about it now. BUT they don't because they are afraid. All this time, these mouthy disciples have been irritating Jesus by talking about what he's going to do before this moment, anticipating what his fame "could" mean for their group, so when the time comes to go and tell, they can't do it. They are too afraid. And so, Jesus has to show up briefly to get them motivated to start preaching the good news.

Did Jesus really show up? Was he mad when he did? The comfort that the other gospels lend to us about him breaking bread and being recognizable isn't in this version of the story. No casual walk. No fish on the grill. No motivational speeches. In this text, the brokenness lingers. The cross casts a very long, long shadow.

And yet there is a striking contrast between the view from Golgotha and taking a look inside an empty tomb. Mark leaves it up to us to put the contrasts of this story together. What does it all mean? How do we carry it forward? Like Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, those who were there, we wonder what has really changed, and how we might possibly tell this impossible story. Will the others ever believe us?

The Easter story is one of the great mysteries of our faith. It is hard to find the right words to tell, and maybe we're still afraid to speak of it for fear that we might come across looking either stupid or revolutionary. In that way, I understand Mark's reluctance completely. Jesus' death on the cross was final. Everyone knew he was dead, dead – dead. Even those who had heard Jesus tell firsthand about the possibility of resurrection were not really inclined to believe that it could be so. In this gospel, the disciples had gone home licking their wounds and counting their losses. They did not go to the grave hopefully expecting a miracle. That's true for all the gospels really. All those

reported to arrive first at that tomb were genuinely shocked. It is a terrifying surprise - a surprise that probably had much better explanations than the one they were asked to tell to the world. *Jesus is not here. He is risen.*

That's the revolutionary part. If they tell the world that death could not imprison their master, their Savior and Lord, that was treason to the state who carried out his execution, and blasphemy to the religion that they were hoping to transform. They would be despised, just as he had been. The Love of Christ was that radical, that profound, and that life-altering. Love that big is threatening! Mark, more so than the other gospel writers may have captured that aspect of the disciples finding out what they were supposed to be doing. Looking into an empty tomb and asking "what's next" might actually feel as dangerous as drinking poison or picking up venomous snakes. At the very least, the empty tomb reminds them that the only way to this kind of life is through death.

Jesus, with his life, was conveying a cosmic truth to fragile human beings, and ones that almost felt like they were better off not knowing. The understanding that new life comes through death is not a foreign concept to us. Seeds die and become plants. Fall turns to Winter, which changes back into Spring. But for people like us, who feel the weight of our mortality, and long to avoid it, embracing that truth can be difficult if not overwhelming.

And as with so many stories of scripture, we need to be told, directly, "Don't be afraid." We are afraid. The outcomes don't look that good, and the world really does look different when you can see beyond the pain and decay of it to the love that embraces our world all around.

It's radical to say that love will prevail beyond the student massacre in Kenya.

It's revolutionary to claim that love will be the ultimate victor – after any war.

It's unheard of to say that love is present on BOTH sides of the 30 foot high walls along the borders of Israel and Palestine.

It's scandalous to say that God loves the poor as much as the rich, sometimes more it seems.

It's fearful to live in the comfort of a nation more expansive and powerful than the Roman Empire's most egotistical dream and proclaim that love is greater than all our riches, more powerful than our military, and that it won't be moved by the whims of our political system.

We have a ways to go to be followers of our Master. Is he disappointed in our lack of faith, our disbelief, and our stubbornness? Disappointment's probably not the best word. He's calling on us to make the sacrifice, and I think the real disappointment is in ourselves. Jesus knows what the full sacrifice looks like. He walked through it fully, so we may know in part what we can do. He is sympathetic, and according to Mark, all he's asking us to do is peer into that tomb, and know that death cannot imprison the love God is willing to show the world. God's love is truly, truly free. Terrifying? Yes. But it is the best possible hope for our world. How will we be put together after we've been so broken? God's love, only God's love. Amen.