

“Easter Unfinished”

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Sunday of the Resurrection

Mark 16.1-8

April 21, 2019

Please read the Scripture by clicking [here](#).

I hope you leave this worship time unsatisfied.

I do hope it's a meaningful time for you. I hope you experience God's presence and promise this morning. I hope you are blessed. But I think we also need to leave unsatisfied. That's how the account we just heard of the first Easter leaves us.

II

I was looking at Easter cards. There were a lot of flowers, butterflies and bunnies, and coloured eggs. Many were religious with empty crosses, Bible quotes, and Jesus.

I got thinking . . . what would an Easter card based on the actual resurrection stories say?

- From him to her: “You're Unbelievable!!” None of the male disciples believed the women.
- For anyone: “It's Easter! Why are you so thick-headed and slow-hearted.” Jesus said that to a couple disciples as they walked along together.
- “May your Easter be terrifying!” That's the account we just heard. It ends with fear.

III

What was happening? With all the chaos, grief and fear of Friday, Jesus' burial had not been done right. So, early Sunday morning, that's what they were going to do.

Everything was still so confused that it was only on the way they remembered the stone. It was far too big for them to handle on their own. Who would help them?

As you heard, that problem was soon solved, but with that a bunch of new problems sprang up. Who had opened the tomb? What had been done to Jesus? What were these disciples supposed to do now?

Who had opened it? A young man, dressed in a white robe, was sitting there, calmly. The only way he could have moved it was if . . . God was at work.

What had been done to Jesus? “*He is risen!*” the man said. “*He is not here!*”

What were these disciples to do now? “*Go and tell the others!*”

They fled. They got away as fast as they could. They were terrified, traumatized, beside themselves.¹ It says they told no one.

Happy Easter!

IV

That's how it ends! *"They said nothing to anyone because they were terrified."* It's incomplete. Of course they told people. That's how we know what happened. The other accounts we have fill in the details. Not only did they find the empty tomb, they soon saw Jesus too. Other disciples also had encounters with him, many of them. They touched Jesus, they had conversations with Jesus, they ate with Jesus, they shared life with Jesus. Jesus, who had been crucified!

" . . . because they were terrified." This ending seems unfinished. So soon people started adding other endings to Mark's Gospel. These tied things together in a more satisfying way. Most of our Bibles include those added endings, with a note that these were added. The oldest manuscripts of Mark's Gospel do not have them. They finish with . . .

" . . . because they were terrified." Why end it that way? Maybe Mark wrote more, but somehow his complete ending got torn off and lost. Maybe Mark was interrupted before he could finish. Or, maybe for some reason Mark ended there on purpose. We don't know. But this is what we have. It's a story of resurrection that finishes with terror and fleeing, then silence.

What do we do with this unfinished ending?

V

Think back to the guy they find in the tomb. He's an angel. That simply means "messenger from God." In this case it seems he's more like Jesus' receptionist. (Sorry, I can only do this next bit Monty Python-style.)²

Hello. You must be looking for Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified. I'm sorry, he's just stepped out. He had somewhere else to be. . . . Are you Mary? And Mary? (Heavens, he knows a lot of Marys.) And you're Salome? (That's different.) . . . Yes, it seems he knew you'd drop by and left a message for you. Where is it? Yes, here. "Tell these dear friends of mine to let my other disciples' know" — those are the men, right, who didn't bother to show up — "let my other disciples and Peter" — he was a very naughty boy, wasn't he! — "tell them that I have gone ahead of them to

¹ The Greek words that describe what had "seized them" are *tromus*, which I've translated as "traumatized" and *ekstatis*, which literally means "to be outside oneself."

² Lance Pape imagines the angel as Jesus' administrative assistant, though presumably without the outrageous English accent. See his "Commentary on Mark 16:1-8, Workingpreacher.org (April 2015), www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2406

Galilee” — dear, that’s a dodgy spot — “There they will see me, just as I said.” There you have it. . . . What? Huh. They’ve just run off screaming. Was it something I said?

Yes, that was terrifying. Still, there was a message they were supposed to deliver. We know from other sources they did.³ *“Tell the other disciples that Jesus is going ahead of you to Galilee. There you will see him.”*

Galilee. That was up north. Jesus was from Galilee, and they were from that area too. That is where it all started, where Jesus began bringing God’s Kingdom. Galilee is where he had called and sent his first disciples. Galilee is where Jesus healed sick people, and battled evil, and forgave sin. It’s where he told perplexing parables. It’s where he stilled storms, fed large crowds from very little, ate with sinners, and claimed lordship over the Sabbath. Galilee is where Jesus was first opposed, and where he proclaimed the good news of God.

Back when he was doing all that, those first disciples had such a hard time understanding. They’d never really got Jesus. They hadn’t yet experienced Jesus’ brutal rejection and execution, nor their own failures. They hadn’t dared dream of his resurrection.⁴ They had no idea all that was how God’s salvation of the world would be accomplished.

But now Jesus has gone back to Galilee. He wants them to go and be there with him. From there he will send them to the world, filled with all they have seen and heard; filled with his Spirit.⁵

All of that is going to happen after this unfinished ending of Easter morning. They are going to continue the story of Easter, not by what is written on a page, but by how they will encounter Jesus next, and by how they will live his mission next.

³ See Matthew 28:1-10,16.

⁴ Pape writes, “The Galilean ministry in the early chapters of Mark is the site of a relentless demonstration of Jesus’ profound agency and power, but it is also the site of profound misunderstanding. Even his closest followers cannot seem to figure out who Jesus is and what he is up to. So pervasive is this theme of misunderstanding, that Mark’s Jesus is constantly asking people to keep silent about him. . . . Jesus doesn’t want people spreading news about him, because they don’t yet have the full picture. His full identity has not yet been disclosed.”

⁵ Matthew 28:16-20.

VI

Remember I said we need to finish our Easter worship time today unsatisfied? I said that because this is where this Good News account of Jesus' resurrection leaves us. Necessarily Unsatisfied.

It leaves us with questions. If we did not have any other account but this one, we would have to ask questions like these. What did Mary, Mary and Salome do next? Did they deliver the message? Did they all go to Galilee? Did they see Jesus there? What was he doing, and what did he have them do alongside him?

These questions are questions about us. They are about you. They are about me. They are questions for us as Jesus' people together.

What will you do next?

Will you deliver the message?

Will you see Jesus?

What is Jesus doing? What will he have you do alongside him?

Jesus is just as risen now as he was then. While we don't see him with the same physical immediacy as they would very soon after, he is with us. And Jesus is in places where we are not. He is telling us to come there and be alongside him.

By itself, that empty tomb did not prove anything. It was only after they encountered Jesus, who had been crucified and was now alive, that they could believe.

Is Jesus alive? I'm very confident he is. Maybe we can only really know by going to where he is around us today, and by discovering what he is doing in our world today, and joining him, and being alongside him.

You will continue the story of Easter as you encounter Jesus, and as you live into his mission.

May the Holy Spirit leave us unsatisfied, so we will do this. Amen.