“Easter People”

Mark 16:1-8

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March 27, 2016

And just like that, Mark’s version of the Gospel ends.

It is an abrupt ending, and if you think about it, it is a lousy ending, really.

The story builds with tension and wonder.

Jesus’ presence on the cross is transformed by his absence in the tomb.

“He has been raised” the mysterious man in white tells the women.

“He isn’t here! Go, tell the others!” He urges them.

This is supposed to be good news! It is supposed to excite them and fill them with joy.

But rather than react with excitement and joy,

Rather than going to tell the disciples,

The women run away.

Of the flight, fight or freeze reactions, it appears they are solidly in the flight category.

They take off down the road, away from the scene.

They don’t tell anyone about what they’ve seen.

They don’t follow the man in white’s directions.

What a lousy ending to the story!

This is a huge disappointment, especially after we’ve seen the women act so wisely up until now.

They were the ones who followed Jesus and listened carefully to their words.

One of these women anointed Jesus at Bethany, knowing his death was coming.

These were the women who faithfully stayed at the foot of the cross.

Of all the people in the Gospel story, my money would have been on them to be the ones who understood the resurrection.

To be the ones who weren’t scared or surprised when he wasn’t in the tomb.

But, sadly, they don’t get it.

At least not in the ending of the story we read today.

There are two other endings, alternative endings, if you will.

In most Bibles they are marked by brackets indicating that they are debated portions of scripture.

Most scholars agree that these two other endings were added in later, by monks or other church leaders who weren’t satisfied by Mark’s abrupt ending.

There is a hot debate about this topic.

Some believe that there really was more to the story at some point, but that it got lost somewhere.

Perhaps Mark got done writing his manuscript and poured himself a celebration glass of wine, only to spill it all over the last few pages he wrote.

Others believe Mark really did intend to finish his story where he does, with the women fleeing in fear and not telling anyone about Jesus.

At this point, we really can’t be sure.

It’s sort of like the mystery around Harper Lee’s recently published book, *Go Set a Watchmen.*

There are many critics who argue that she didn’t actually write the book.

That someone else used her name to publish it under.

Others posit that she did write it, but they aren’t sure if she really wanted it published.

Because, most would agree, it isn’t nearly as good as her first novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird.*

When you’ve written a masterpiece like To Kill a Mockingbird, wouldn’t you want to just quit while you’re ahead?

How can you top a book like that?

Let’s just say that Mark did intend to end the story at verse 8.

That there was never more to the manuscript.

That those two alternative endings are bogus.

Perhaps Mark is actually a literary genius, much like Harper Lee.

That this intentionally abrupt ending is a masterful work of art.

Perhaps Mark realized he couldn’t do the resurrection story justice.

How does a writer capture the overwhelming wonder of the resurrection?

The task just sounds daunting.

So maybe Mark left the story open ended for a reason.

Choosing not to write down the details of how Jesus reappears to the world.

Choosing not to describe the resurrection.

Instead Mark leaves it with the terrified women, running away from the situation.

Too afraid to tell anyone.

If someone who isn’t familiar with Christianity were to be given the Gospel of Mark, they’d be disappointed in this ending!

After the climax of Jesus’ death and resurrection, it would be a terrible let down to think that the witnesses were too afraid to tell anyone about it.

An unfamiliar audience might think that no one heard about the Gospel.

That Christianity died right then and there.

Like the death of a family tradition, forever lost because the next generations didn’t care.

But here we sit, in a church, celebrating Resurrection Sunday – Easter Sunday!

So, obviously the story didn’t end there.

Obviously those women told someone about the Good News!

The story of Jesus’ resurrection spread, a movement began.

2,000 years later, we still trust that this story is true.

The story has remained alive.

Perhaps Mark ends his gospel so abruptly for a reason.

Robert Fowler says that the reader can respond to the story “in a multitude of ways, among them the option of telling the story that was never told.

The burden of response-ability lies wholly on those of us standing outside the story.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

It is up to us to tell the rest of the story.

Continuing the story where Mark left off.

Spreading this story of hope and redemption.

Joining in all those who have gone before us, telling this Good News to the world.

We start by reading the accounts from Matthew, Luke and John.

They offer more details than Mark.

They share the story of Jesus appearing to the disciples.

They mention the ascension of Jesus back to Heaven.

We can then turn to Paul’s letters.

We can read about the early church and how they got started.

But then we move beyond the Bible, bearing witness to how this Easter story has been made manifest throughout the world.

We can tell the story of the Christianity growing and spreading.

Of all those people who faithfully kept the Easter story alive.

We can tell about our ancestors who passed this story down through the generations.

We Presbyterians can tell about our church’s Scottish heritage.

How John Knox and others got our denomination going.

How a handful of people gathered on a hot day in July more than 100 years ago and started this church in Luling.

We can tell about First Presbyterian’s role in helping this Easter story carry on.

About how this church has remained open, even through difficult years.

When church leaders had to decide which bills to pay.

And now, the way people outside the church will know that this Easter story lives on, is through the faithful witness of the church.

As we faithfully gather each week to worship God and proclaim the Good News.

We are telling this Easter story.

Every time we serve at the Food Bank, or take up an offering for World Mission.

We are telling this Easter story.

Whenever we show hospitality to the high school students by feeding them lunch.

We are telling this Easter story.

Or whenever we invite a neighbor to church.

We are telling this Easter story.

All of these words and actions are our way of continuing the story that was not finished in Mark.

With our words and actions, we turn this Easter story into a living, breathing Gospel.

Because we are Easter people.

Our lives bear witness to the story of Jesus’ resurrection.

We carry on this Good News, making it heard and seen all these years later.

Mark may have stopped writing at the point where the women went away in fear.

But we know that wasn’t the end of the story.

We can be encouraged to know that God can work through us even in our fear and silence.

Even in our discomfort and fatigue.

The Gospel message still carries on, perhaps in spite of us.

The Good News of Easter Sunday is that this story lives on.

There’s nothing that can prevent it from being heard and experienced.

Because God is so much bigger than our weakness.

God prevails when we fall through.

We just have to trust that God is doing this transformative work each and every day.

That this story of Easter is unfolding before our eyes.

That our lives bear witness to this resurrection story.

We are Easter people, thanks be to God! Amen.

1. Robert M. Fowler,. *Let the Reader Understand: Reader-response Criticism and the Gospel of Mark (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991),*, 250. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)