

# Again & Again: The Sun Rises

## Easter Sunday

Mark 16:1-6  
College Hill Presbyterian Church, Tulsa

Rev. Todd B. Freeman  
April 4, 2021

Endings are important. Successful authors, playwrights, and screenwriters know any great story has a really good ending. For haven't we all read a book or seen a movie that we really liked, but because it had a very unsatisfying ending the whole story was, in part, ruined? An especially effective type of ending, though not always satisfying, is called the "cliffhanger." The story just stops with no apparent ending, leaving the audience to either come back next season, continue to binge watch the next episode, or wait for the next book or movie sequel.

**Cliffhanger endings intend for us to finish the story for ourselves in our own minds. Jesus was a master of the open-ended conclusion in the telling of many of his parables.** For instance, in the parable of the Prodigal Son, the ending leaves the resentful older brother standing out in the field after being invited by his father into the house to join the party for his younger prodigal brother who had returned home. What will he do? Will he stay bitter or join in the celebration? Jesus intended us to put ourselves in the shoes of the older brother and answer that question for ourselves.

Well, an open-ended conclusion is what has apparently happened in the Gospel of Mark. Verse 8 concludes with: "And they [the women] went out and fled from the tomb; for terror and amazement had seized them; and **they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.**" The literal translation from the Greek actually ends with a proposition, "they were afraid for." **What kind of an ending is that, especially for a good news gospel?** Perhaps the most important story of the Christian faith just stops and the end just hangs there, unresolved.

In English language versions of the Bible, there are an additional twelve verses that have been added after verse 8. Sometimes they are located down in the footnotes at the bottom of the page, with the statement that the earliest Greek manuscripts do not include those additional verses. Or, like in our Pew Bibles, they have included those additional verses in brackets under the separate headings "The Shorter Ending of Mark," and "The Longer Ending of Mark." **Most all biblical scholars agree, that these extra verses, due to their strikingly different style in the original Greek text, were added to the end of the Gospel of Mark** sometime in the second century by the early Church, or some editor, who felt they needed to add a more appropriate conclusion to this story. Hence, the post-resurrection appearances by Jesus followed by his ascension.

So, unless in the unlikely case that last page of Mark's gospel simply got lost, **we must assume that he intended his gospel to end in such an abrupt and open-ended way.** Perhaps the gospel writer Mark intended to have us put ourselves in the shoes of the women who found the tomb empty on that Easter morning – Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome. Undoubtedly, this was a transforming moment in the lives of those women, and for Christians ever since.

**We are being asked to consider how this Easter story transforms you and me, and the church.** How would you, then, finish and write the ending of this story? Perhaps it might help to examine some of the unfinished stories in our nation at the moment. How would you write their endings? There's the continuing investigation into the insurrection at our nation's capital in January. A Capital police officer died after being intentionally run into by a lone driver just two days ago on Good Friday. There's the current trial of the police officer accused of killing George Floyd, which ignited a racial reckoning in our nation and propelled the Black Lives Matter movement, of which we stand in solidarity, in part, with those words painted on our church parking lot. The COVID-19 pandemic itself has left many unfinished stories, including the revelation of the deep disparities in our healthcare systems. As a pastor, I wonder how families have found – or lacked – closure in the wake of losing their loved ones during this year when a regular church memorial service gathering wasn't possible. A slow return to normal after a devastating year fighting the COVID-19 pandemic has brought back with it a return to mass shootings in our nation. What about the unfinished story of how to address rampant gun violence in our country? And what about the unfinished stories of Christian nationalism and White supremacy?

While these and so many other issues are deeply and rightfully troubling, **the promise of Easter adds a hopeful, "...and yet." Metaphorically, Easter is the proof that the sun still rises.** Therefore, just as an unfinished story will not let us go, **let it be for us a call to action, an opportunity to help write a possible ending.** What will we do with these transformed lives of ours, individually and as a community of faith? How can we spread that hope, transformation and new beginnings within our families, communities, nation, and beyond? **Your story, my story, our story is as yet unfinished.**

In Mark's narrative, within the empty tomb a young man, dressed in a white robe says to the women, "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here...But 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" (vv. 6-7). And **that is exactly where we will meet and encounter Christ, the Sacred Presence of God, today and every day – out ahead of us. Galilee, as a metaphor, represents the everyday world – the place where ordinary people live and work. It is in our own daily living where we are to work out the ending to Mark's Easter story.** Former president of McCormick Theological Seminary (Presbyterian) in Chicago wrote back in 2001:

Where charity and love prevail over injustice and violence; where compassion and hope replace cynicism and despair; where peace and love take root in lives that are empty and lost; where human beings know joy and justice, dignity and delight: there is the risen Christ beckoning to us.

When is an ending not an end? When the end is just the beginning of a story about eternal and abundant life.

**I invite you to think about an act of solidarity you could take, and we can take together as a community of faith, in the midst of your own daily life that might promote justice, peace, and equity, an act that can help lead others to hope, transformation, and new beginnings.**

Today is April 4. On this day 53 years ago, an assassin's bullet took the life of Martin Luther King, Jr. On April 27, 1957, Dr. King delivered an Easter sermon titled,

"Questions that Easter Answers." Easter ultimately demonstrates, as King preached, "love is the most powerful force in the universe." Reflecting on that sermon and the life and death of Dr. King, Eddie S. Glaude Jr., Professor of African American Studies at Princeton University, writes:

We are not to sit idly by because Easter proclaims the victory. Too many Christians take comfort in the wrong-headed idea that all is settled because Jesus rose from the dead. Martin Luther King, Jr's death suggests otherwise. His was a life given in love and in devotion to justice.

Are we, Christian or not, as committed? To stopping war? To ending poverty? To fighting for the most vulnerable among us?... Cowardice and complicity must die in us. And we must rise again to "love" a new world into existence.

The words, "...for they were afraid" are not the final words. This is not the end of the story. For again and again, the sun rises on a new day. Happy Easter!

Amen.

Resources:

Cynthia Campbell, "When Is an Ending Not the End?" 2001.

Roger Gench, "Looking into the Lectionary", *The Presbyterian Outlook*, 3-29-21.

Eddie S. Glaude, *Martin Luther King's Easter Message*, CNN, April 4, 2010.