

“Publish Glad Tidings—or Not!”

Salado UMC—1 April 2018
Easter Day
Preaching Text: Mark 16:1-8—Year B
Salado, Texas 76571

**“It is one of the great secrets of life that those things
which are most worth doing, we do for others” —(Lewis Carroll, 1832—1898).**

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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. **2** And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. **3** They had been saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?” **4** When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. **5** As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed.

6 But 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. **7** 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.” **8** So 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 (Mark 16:1-8 NRSV)

Most of us I suppose like certain kinds of puzzles—at least to a point. *The New York Times* Daily Crossword Puzzle is a puzzle to which many Americans look forward each morning. Rubik’s cube is a puzzle that has notoriety as well. My son told me that the world’s record for solving the Rubik puzzle is 4.904 seconds. I stand amazed that someone could solve a cube that quickly and that my son also knew this fact!

Easter Day represents the unlocking of a mysterious puzzle more than any other day in the Christian year. The puzzle of which I speak is the puzzle that we call the meaning of life. Thoughtful people recognize that when Paul writes about “the law of sin and of death” (Romans 8:2), then he writes to all of us. People, who are not yet satisfied with the person that we are, and understand human mortality, grasp that these circumstances continuously hang over our heads. How can we be fully human knowing that we sin against God, others, and ourselves? How can we be fully human knowing that soon we will all die? Jesus’ resurrection addresses these questions. The resurrection affirms that there is more to human life than merely summed up by the phrase “here today and gone tomorrow.” Mark’s Gospel offers a vision of Jesus’ resurrection on the “first day of the week.”

When we speak of puzzles, Mark’s Gospel has its share. First there is what scholars call the “messianic secret.” In Mark Jesus tells his disciples not to reveal what they had seen or heard. In Mark 7:36 we read, “Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them, the more

zealously they proclaimed it.” Later in Mark 9:9 we find these words coming down: “the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.” On occasion people suggest the answer to the “messianic secret” puzzle is that Jesus was using a form of “reverse psychology.” By telling them not to share their experience Jesus virtually guaranteed that they would. Yet, Jesus’ rationale was simpler and less crafty. Jesus knew that prior to his resurrection the disciples simply could not grasp or share good news this good.

Another puzzling aspect of Mark’ Gospel is the odd event that occurs after all Jesus disciples fled from the danger surrounding Jesus’ arrest. In a bizarre story we read: “A certain young man was following him, wearing nothing but a linen cloth. They caught hold of him, but he left the linen cloth and ran off naked” (Mark 14:51-52). No one has ever figured out exactly who this character in Mark’s Gospel is. Yet, some scholars believe it was the evangelist himself. Could Mark have written himself into his Gospel much like Rembrandt painted himself into some of his paintings?

While the briefest Gospel, even so Mark is clearly an artist. Several features of Mark’s Gospel bear mention. First most biblical scholars believe that Mark’s story of Jesus was the first of the four Gospels to relate Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. Second Mark displays a marked sense of urgency as he recounts the ministry of Jesus. Unlike Matthew and Luke who relate the origins of Jesus in a manger and his trip to Egypt with the Holy Family, Mark begins, more or less, with John the Baptizer baptizing Jesus in the river Jordan. In addition, the word “immediately” appears in the Bible’s NRSV translation seventy-eight times. Out of these 78 instances, Mark uses the term “immediately” a whopping 27 (twenty-seven times: see Mark 1:12, 18, 20, 42; 2:12; 3:6; 4:15-17 for a few examples). To read Mark straight through from beginning to end will leave a reader breathless. Mark narrates Jesus’ story thoroughly and quickly.

Still, the most peculiar of all the puzzles concerning the Gospel of Mark is its ending. There are three different and distinctive conclusions to Mark’s Gospel. If you possess a suitable study Bible, then you may look it up for yourself. The manuscripts call these endings the “shorter ending,” the “longer ending” and finally what we read a few minutes ago—“the traditional ending.” The traditional ending is most likely the authentic ending. This traditional ending, we find in the Gospel’s oldest surviving manuscripts.

You ask why three endings of a Gospel? My guess is that in the first few decades of the church, as believers read scripture and worshipped God in the person of Jesus Christ the church relied on a few original documents. These texts included the emerging letters of Paul and the writings about Jesus that eventually came to be scripture. The earliest churches noted the abrupt ending of Mark. Perhaps Mark’s original conclusion was so painful to these earliest Christians that the first church folk resolved to offer another and more complete ending. The shorter and longer endings of Mark were more in accord with the other Gospels. Consequently, later writers offered two other Marcan endings, alongside the traditional, although painful, ending. What really happened we can’t know. Honestly, we lost this literary truth to history.

So, this is how Mark concludes the Gospel: “So 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” (Mark 16:8).

In a way, Mark offers us modern believers a wonderful and blessed opportunity. By leaving the ending of Mark’s Gospel as it is, that is relatively open-ended, we contemporary people have the opportunity to complete the gospel story in our own way. Rather than flee from the open tomb this Easter morning we can go forth into our world and spheres of influence. As we go to these places, then

perhaps we too can write our own unique gospel ending that Jesus Christ has risen. We can write it with our own life! Jesus has risen indeed! Amen.

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