



04/04/21 Easter Day
Acts 10:34-43; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11; Mark 16:1-8
Reverend Giuseppe Mattei

In Mark's gospel the women go to the tomb early in the morning for the purpose of anointing the body of Jesus for his final rest. They wonder among themselves whether they would find someone able to roll back the rock blocking the entrance for them. To their surprise, the rock is already removed. The passive verb hints at divine intervention: God has negated and undone what appeared to be final, the sealing of Jesus' tomb. Inside, a young man dressed in white announces the resurrection of Jesus to them.

The message of the resurrection must be proclaimed. The man in white, this angelic emissary, does his part. Then, he gives a commission: Go and tell the disciples and Peter that he'll see them all in Galilee just as he had announced. Jesus' ministry is not finished, yet.

After the Last Supper and on their way to the Mount of Olives, Jesus predicted the disciples' loss of faith and their scattering, but he also added: "[A]fter I am raised up I will go ahead of you in Galilee." (Mk 14:28). Jesus was abandoned by all of them who had been with him, seen him in action, witnessed his miracles, eaten with him. Even the women who are now at the tomb for the anointing kept at a distance during the whole ordeal.

The disciples have miserably failed, yet there is indication that this failure can be overcome if they go back to Galilee where Jesus called them at the beginning of the story (Mk 1:14-20) and still wants to reunite them now. Jesus does not intend to lose them permanently: those who were scattered by the events of the passion will become community again. What a great sign of forgiveness and grace: Jesus does not give up on us but keeps on calling us back again and again.

The women's response is not one of joy and hope as reported in the other gospels but one of terror and amazement. Most scholars agree that v. 8 is the original ending to Mark's gospel before it would receive additional verses from a final editor.

Mark's conclusion of the resurrection story is quite strange: the women are amazed and afraid at the same time. It's quite confusing for the women and for us: what happened to the joyful proclamation of the victory of life over death? Why is that happy ending missing? Did Mark doubt the resurrection?

Mark's ending may be the welcome conclusion for many a people who may not feel totally in synch with the Easter festivities and are not sure about the resurrection. Many have fallen victims to covid and are not with us this Easter Day. Hate and violence are still in our streets and injustice is baked in our institutions. Maybe it is OK not to have a happy ending to the gospel; maybe this ending is more reflective of our current situation.

Maybe it is OK if we do not have a clear sense of how the resurrection works; it is OK if we do not fully grasp its meaning; it is OK to live in ambiguity between fear and amazement. There are many shades to life. Perhaps, that is exactly what Mark intended to say.



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Yes, Mark's "original ending" contains hope: even in times of uncertainty and fear, we can live the story of resurrection, trusting Jesus' words, the church's testimony, and the intriguing possibility of new life in Christ. We cannot predict where our leap of faith will take us. Will we have the endurance to hold on to his Word?

As our life still goes on with its uncertainties, its triumphs, and its setbacks, Mark's gospel is a good companion. Most of the time we live with an awkward, unresolved mix of fears and possibilities, in which resurrection is hinted at rather than completed.

The promise of the resurrection is that life goes on but not in despair and fear. It now becomes an adventure motivated by faith-inspired questions:

- What if I allowed the Spirit of Jesus to guide me?
- What if I let my doubting heart of stone melt away?
- What if I trusted fully and without reservations the Word of God?
- What if I believed as many did before me that I could be totally forgiven and washed in the grace of God?
- What if I knelt in prayer and meditation at the foot of the cross, sign of Jesus' amazing love for me?
- What if I refused to live by a victim mentality that forces me to seek someone to blame?
- What if I truly trusted that I am lovable, that I am wanted, that I too can be healed of any resentment, freed of my fears, and filled with the courage to forgive, to reach out, to embrace all people, and to see how I can be of service?
- What if I take courage in the fact that they could kill Jesus but wouldn't be able to silence the Word of Life?

Imagine that: a life lived free in the risen Lord; free to love; free to bless; free to laugh with those who rejoice and free to mourn in hope with the neglected, the abused, and the excluded. Imagine a life lived in the shadow of the words of the psalmist:

O give thanks to the Lord, for He is good;
His steadfast love endures forever!

Let Israel say,
"His steadfast love endures forever."
The right hand of the Lord is exalted!
The right hand of the Lord acts valiantly!"
I shall not die, but live,
and declare the works of the Lord.



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The apostle Paul gives us a strong encouragement: I have proclaimed to you the good news. You have received it. Now stand in that word unless you have received it in vain.¹

“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my rock and my Redeemer.” (Psalm 19:14)

Amen.

¹ See 1 Corinthians 15:1-2