

Writing Your Ending to the Resurrection

Mark 16:1-8

Scott B. Martin – April 12, 2009

Do you enjoy a happy ending when you read a book or watch a movie? Most people do. If we don't get it we feel something important is missing. We might even feel cheated. Most of us want the ending to tie up all the loose ends, solve all the mysteries and assure us that everyone lives happily ever after.

Easter, with its celebration of the resurrection of Christ, would seem to be the ultimate happy ending. The bad guys are thwarted. The good guy we thought was dead is suddenly found to be alive and will receive all the honor and glory due him. His friends and followers mourning turns to joy and they will be empowered to begin the work of building the Kingdom of God.

Yes, most of us like a happy ending. Sometimes we even skip to the back of the book to read the ending, to see how it turns out, before we read the rest of the book. We want to be assured that there is a happy ending. Once we have assured ourselves of this we are ready for all the twists and turns of the plot.

Given all this, what are we to make with ending we have in the Gospel of Mark? Mark is notable for what it does not have. There is no Great Commission, no road to Emmaus, no breakfast on the beach with the risen Jesus, no appearances to any of the disciples or any of Jesus' followers. All we get is an empty tomb with a mysterious "young man dressed in white" who tells the three women who have come to anoint Jesus' body "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. 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.” This is all well and good but Mark’s gospel ends in verse 8 with these words, **“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.”** We can give points to the Gospel of Mark for honesty, but what kind of way is this to end a book that begins **“The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the ‘Son of God?’”**

Now some of you may be objecting at this point. If you are looking at your pew Bible you may have noticed that the Gospel of Mark does not seem to end at 16:8. It seems to go on another 12 verses, ending at 16:20. For what I am about to say I don’t want you to simply take my word for it, I want you to see it for yourself. Open your pew Bibles to Mark 16:1-8, found on page _____. Look at the footnotes at the bottom of the page. I’d like somebody with really good eyes that can read small print to read what it says.....

That’s right, the Gospel of Mark has at least three and maybe more endings! Now, there’s something that not many people know. It shows the importance of having a good Bible with footnotes. It also gives you a bit of insight into how scholars come up with translations and new editions of the Bible. It also shows how many early Christians were so dissatisfied with the way Mark ended that they wrote their own ending, drawing on traditional Christian theology and what the other three gospel writers had written.

What are we to make of this? Some scholars say the original ending of Mark was lost. Perhaps the end of the scroll broke off. Other scholars say Mark ended it this way on purpose. Either way, the original author of Mark’s gospel, as we have it today, ends with verse 8. I’m inclined to go with rather than the later endings.

There are draw backs to a neat happy endings. Happy endings have a way of letting us off the hook. Everything is resolved. We are reassured the world is a neat orderly place where the good are rewarded and the bad come up a cropper. There is nothing left of us to do except say “Amen” and go home, story over. This will happen in churches all around the world today.

For Mark the story does end with Jesus’ resurrection. It’s just getting started, “...Jesus is going ahead of you...” Mark basically says there is much more to this story to come and you have a place in this story, get going. Write your own ending with your life, trust in the resurrection, Jesus will meet you as you move towards him! Keep moving there are more lines to be written yet. Yes, I like the open endedness of Mark’s Gospel.

I also like the honesty of Mark’s ending. Mark leaves us hanging between the amazing promise that Christ is risen as he said he would and that he is going before and the women’s reaction of amazement and fear. Some endings are just too neat by half. A mystery in which the butler actually did do leaves us disappointed. It’s just too neat. It’s just too stereotypical. It closes down too many other possibilities.

“He is not here, he is risen. See this is where they laid him. He is not here.” In Mark’s gospel Jesus is not even in the end of Mark’s story. The Christ is moving on ahead, off the pages of Mark’s Gospel and out into the world, out into the world where we live. “He is going ahead of us...” There is a sense in which we will not find the Christ in the pages of the Bible, but out in the world, here and now. The risen Christ will not be captured and stuck on a page, even the pages of Gospel which tells his story.

When Joseph Stalin came to power in Russia he sought to eradicate Christianity in Russia. To do this he sent teachers and commissars to every

city, town, hamlet and rural area to give speeches denouncing Jesus Christ. These speakers were to try and replace Jesus Christ with Karl Marx.

On one of these occasions the speaker spoke long and eloquently. He was sure he had made the case against Christianity and surpassing value of communism. When he had come to the end of his speech a Russian Orthodox priest stood in the back of the room and said, "I have only one thing to say, 'Christ is risen!'" Immediately the whole crowd of peasants responded, "Christ is risen indeed!" They had experienced the risen Christ in their lives. They were convinced he was risen and they were not afraid to say so.

The Christ wants to be part of our story and the Christ wants us to be part of his ongoing story. He is ever going ahead of us on our journey through life. Christ will meet us as we move towards him. Let us write our own ending to the resurrection story. Amen!