

## Sermon Continued with Rev. Andy Morgan, FCPC

Please hear this reading from Mark 16:7-8, the original ending of Mark's Gospel.

<sup>7</sup> But go, tell his disciples, even Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'" <sup>8</sup> Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

The film is coming to a conclusion, the conflict is resolving but there are still a few loose ends to be tied up before it comes to a satisfying end. Just then, with the story seemingly incomplete, the screen goes black and the credits roll. This doesn't seem like the end of the story, does it? The comedy classic, Monty Python and the Holy Grail ends abruptly with the (then) current police breaking up the medieval battle of Knights. And then, a black screen. Wait, what? We have questions. What happens next? Films like *No Country for Old Men*, *The Matrix Reloaded*, *There Will be Blood*, *Inception*, the objectively terrible *The Grey*, and so many other stories and films that simply fade to black with so many questions left unanswered leaving the viewer throwing up their hands in exasperation and confusion and saying "this doesn't seem like the end of the story, does it?" There's so much left to do, who will carry the story?

That may be how we feel about this ending of Mark's gospel here in chapter 16, verses 7-8. It doesn't seem like the end of the story, does it? Yes, verses 9-20 follow, but those two endings are both understood to be later additions, you can even see in your Bible (there might be a little sub-heading that says something like "what follows was not part of the original manuscript", not the words of Mark's original author. But it doesn't seem like the end of the story, does it? There are tons of scholarly theories seeking to explain this abrupt ending with some scholars believing that an original, longer ending did exist (it seems like it would about have to), but perhaps it was lost to time or even got physically ripped off the manuscript. Theories and speculation aside, what we know is that verse 8 is the ending we have and it just doesn't seem like the end of the story, does it?

And so, the oldest gospel's original ending ends this way, with an account of the amazing news that Jesus' resurrection has taken place, that he isn't in the tomb, and a message and charge to go and tell the disciples that Jesus is on the loose (and they'll see him in Galilee). And so, we're leaning in, watching this story play out, with our Easter outfits on and big hats and seersucker (or maybe this year, our Easter pajamas), we're ready for more from the story. Will they see Jesus? Will the disciples reconcile with Jesus after they abandoned him? What about Peter? What will happen in Galilee and beyond? We see the story coming to a close, now tie up those loose ends and let's go to lunch. And then, the women leave the tomb fearful and they tell no one. The screen darkens and the credits roll. What? This doesn't seem like the end of the story, does it? There's so much left to see, so many questions to ask and see answered, and this ending seems like such a bleak way to end such an incredibly hopeful story because it leaves us wondering who will carry this message of hope and bring it to the world.

Everyone else in the gospel, as Mark presents it, has failed to shoulder the hopeful news of the coming Kingdom that Jesus proclaims. Religious leaders, government officials, hometown acquaintances, the folks who raised their hosannas and lined the streets with palm branches were the same ones that called for his death, the disciples, even Peter; each one has failed Jesus, has failed to carry the message of hope in God's coming Kingdom, and as the story concludes, we're left at the empty tomb, with an angel, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, Salome, and a message. A message that everyone else in the story failed to carry, a message about the coming Kingdom and what it means for the world. Here again, the message is rested on the shoulders the last hope to spread this good news throughout the world.

The angel says, "Go, tell his disciples (the ones who deserted him, the ones who never fully understood him, that took him for granted, that fell asleep when he asked them to stay up and pray,

who failed him, who doubted him) go tell them, and even Peter, the one who denied Jesus three times, go, tell them that he is going ahead, and they will see him in Galilee.” And the message rested on the backs of these women was not that they would find condemnation and retribution...the message was that Jesus was waiting and they would find compassion and restitution. They would find grace and forgiveness. Their story wasn’t done. Their failings didn’t define their future. God wasn’t done with them.

They were tasked to shoulder the same message proclaimed by Jesus in word and deed from the beginning, the message that God isn’t done working in and through us, our past doesn’t bind us...the story isn’t over. Even then, after the cross and the empty tomb and the ways that they failed Jesus, God isn’t done with them; the good news is that God is capable and willing to work through them in their failure...God isn’t done working. The forgiveness and grace offered in and through Jesus means that we’re not bound by our past/our failures/our missteps/our fear/our selfishness, our futures are open and God isn’t done, not with us, not with the world.

This is the message that Jesus proclaimed...this is the message that all those in the story buckled under the weight of. And now, it was placed on the backs of Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of James, and Salome, the last hope to share the news in the story. Go, tell them, the ones who abandoned him, even Peter, go and tell them that he is not dead, he was raised, he is who he said he was, and what he said was true. God isn’t done. And they flee, afraid with mouths seemingly incapable of speaking the message tasked to them. The end. Or is it?

This doesn’t seem like the end of the story, does it? And so, we’re left wondering who will carry the message, who will tell the story that Jesus is who he said he was and he’s on the loose, restoring the world through grace and forgiveness, that we’re unburdened of our pasts and our future is possible through him. Who will tell the story that needs to be told to a hurting and fearful world? This doesn’t seem like the end of the story, does it?

The genius of Mark’s gospel is that there is one character left on screen in the story as the curtain closes, one character who was there the whole time, through the baptism and temptation, the ministry and miracles, the suffering and death, and even the news of the resurrection and call to bring the news to the world; there is one character left to tell the story. It’s you. It’s me. It’s us. It’s anyone who’s ever read this universe-altering story of Jesus. The reader has been there the whole time and is the only one left at the end, the final character that, by default, is charged to go and tell this Easter story.

Who will carry the message? Who will tell the story that needs to be told to a hurting world? We will, we have to. The reason that Mark 16:8 doesn’t seem like the end of the story because it isn’t. The church was built on the hope of the empty tomb...the story was told and continues to be told. It’s not the end of the story, It’s the beginning of our story of bearing witness to the world-healing power of grace and forgiveness in the world, it’s just the first act of our story of showing the boundless hope that comes when we proclaim with word and deed that our past mistakes are not too great for God’s purposes, it’s just start of our collective narrative that says forgiveness is better than revenge and compassion is better than violence.

What a heavy and important story we carry, friends. What a tremendously powerful story of hope we are tasked to embody to a world that is in desperate need of it. What a life-changing, system-inverting, universe-altering message of grace and forgiveness we are called to proclaim.<sup>8</sup> Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid. It isn’t the end of the story, friends, it’s the beginning of ours.

In the name of the father, the son and the holy spirit. **Amen.**