

Who Will Finish The Story?

(Mark 16:1-8)

Intro: What a strange way to end a Gospel!
What a strange way to end the Easter story!
-“They said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.”

I. The Gospel Had Such A Promising Beginning.

A. Mark 1:1.

1. “The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”

a. Gospel.

-Means good news.

-We’re expecting a happy ending.

#A “happily-ever-after” ending.

b. Jesus Christ.

-Name Jesus means:

#Yahweh saves.

#God saves.

#Savior.

-Christ.

#Not Jesus last name.

#Title.

*Messiah.

+Hebrew.

*Christos.

+Greek.

#Means.

*Anointed One.

+Anointed by God.

+Chosen by God.

*To save God’s people from their sin.

c. Son of God.

-Who else could accomplish such a task?

#My wife and I have been in moving mode.

*Ever since Keith Khoo called me.

+On February 6.

+Told me that the Call Committee.

=Was going to recommend to the Church Council.

-That you call me as your pastor.

*On President's Day.
+February 20.
=I went to Sam's.
=I bought a roll of bubble wrap.
-To begin packing the framed pictures.
#That covered the walls.
*Of our home.
*In St. Louis.
-Both Pam and I are shutter bugs.
#Some of our pictures.
*We've enlarged.
*Framed.
-They were the first things.
#To be packed.
-They are likely the last things.
#To be unpacked.
-The first will be last.
#The last will be first.

#In moving.

*One has to decide.
+What to save.
+What not to save.
*Where we lived in University City.
+City had a recycling program.
=We had two large bins.

-One for:
#Plastic.
#Aluminum.
#Glass.
-Other for:
#Paper.

+For the first couple of weeks.
=Paper bin was filled to capacity.
-To the point I could hardly lift it.
-As I cleaned:
#Shelves.
#Files.
*In my study.

+But by the time I got to the basement.
=That bin wasn't big enough.
-I filled the bin.
-I filled box after box.
#Set them on the curb.
#All the things I had saved.
*Over 28 years of ministry.
*Over 25 years in one house.
#Weren't worth saving anymore.

#Even at that, there were still a few oversights.

*One of the things I unpacked this last week.

+Missouri Driver's Manual.

=I don't think I'm going to need that.

-Here in Oklahoma.

*Some of things we did need to save.

+Got lost.

=It took Pam almost a week.

-To find the cables to her computer.

=It took me almost a week.

-To find a dust pan.

#I had a broom

#I didn't have a dust pan.

-Who are we?

#To accomplish this salvation business.

-It took:

#Jesus.

#The Christ.

#The Son of God.

B. But Things Took A Nasty Turn For Him.

1. He was treated like a common criminal.

a. Arrested.

b. Tried.

c. Convicted.

d. Sentenced.

e. Executed.

-On a cross.

2. Then buried.

a. In a rock-hewn tomb.

b. His grave sealed by a stone.

C. But Now It Is The Third Day.

1. The original "Spice Girls" have gone to the tomb.

a. To anoint his body for burial.

2. The stone has been rolled away.

3. There is no body to anoint.

4. Only a young man.

a. Dressed in white.

b. Who tells them:

- "Don't be alarmed."

- "You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified."

- "He has risen!"

- "He is not here."

- "See the place where they laid him."

- "But go, tell his disciples and Peter:"

- #“He is going ahead of you into Galilee.”
- #“There you will see him, just as he told you.”
- c. The women fled from the tomb.
 - They said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.
 - #What a strange way to end a Gospel!
 - #What a strange way to end the Easter story!

II. The Ending Of Mark Has Been A Problem For The Church From Early On.

A. Alternate Endings Have Been Added.

1. Second century.
 - a. So-called “Longer Ending” was added.
 - Mark 16:9-20.
 - b. Complete with:
 - Easter proclamation.
 - #By Mary Magdalene.
 - Post-resurrection appearances.
 - #By Jesus.
2. 7th-9th centuries.
 - a. So-called “Shorter Ending” was composed.
 - b. Women told the good news.
 - c. Jesus himself instructed that the story be told.

B. Alternate Interpretations Have Been Proposed.

1. The women said nothing to anyone “else.”
 - a. Until they had found the disciples.
 - b. Told them the good news.
2. But that’s not what the text says.
3. It totally ignores the fact that the women were afraid.

C. Gospel of Mark Was Written To Persecuted Christians.

1. There was a lot of fear.
2. To proclaim the Gospel was to run the risk of:
 - a. Arrest.
 - b. Imprisonment.
 - c. Death.
3. It was often:
 - a. Easier.
 - b. Safer.
 - To say nothing to anyone.
 - For they were afraid.
4. But such an ending.
 - a. Unsatisfactory.
 - b. Incomplete.
 - c. Anything but good news.
 - d. Leaves us wondering:

III. Who Will Finish The Story?

A. We Know Who Can't Do It.

1. Jesus.
 - a. He has not only risen from the grave.
 - b. He has ascended to the Father.
 - His mission is accomplished.
2. Not Jesus' Galilean disciples.
 - a. Dead and gone.
 - b. Every single one of them.
3. Not the women.
 - a. Even if they were able to overcome their fear.
 - b. They, too, have long since departed the scene.
4. So who will finish the story?

B. Maybe Mark Intended For Us To Finish The Story.

1. You know the saying.
 - a. "If it's to be, it's up to me."
 - b. "If it's to be, it's up to thee."
2. We know the grave is empty.
 - a. Historians and archaeologists.
 - Don't know the precise burial location for Jesus.
 - Two traditional sites are proposed.
 - #Church of the Holy Sepulcher.
 - *With its gaudy marble mausoleum.
 - *Doesn't look anything like it would have looked.
 - +2000 years ago.
 - #Garden tomb.
 - *With its roughly chiseled rock.
 - *Channel in front.
 - +Where the stone could have been rolled.
 - =Back and forth.
 - b. When I was in Jerusalem in 1992.
 - I visited both sites.
 - Both were empty.
 - Above the doorway of the Garden Tomb.
 - #The Biblical proclamation:
 - *"He's not here."
 - *"He has been raised."
 - c. We believe it.
 - You probably wouldn't be here if you didn't.
 - We stake our lives on Jesus' resurrection.
 - #That's the easy part.
 - #The harder part is:
 - *Going.
 - *Telling.

3. There is the problem of our fear.
 - a. It's not just the women who were afraid.
 - b. Fear can paralyze us, too.
 - What are we afraid of?
 - #We won't be believed?
 - #We'll be labeled as religious fanatics?
 - #We'll get in an argument about religion?
 - #We'll get into a discussion?
 - *Shows we don't know our Bibles.
 - *As well as we should.
 - Fear makes cowards of us all.
4. "Perfect love casts out all fear."
 - a. 1 John 4:18.
 - b. That can seem like all we need to do is love:
 - More.
 - Better.
 - Longer.
 - Harder.
 - c. But my love is not perfect.
 - On Thursday evening.
 - #Ellen Harris reminded us:
 - *Jesus gave us a new command.
 - + "Love one another."
 - + John 13:34.
 - #She pointed us to 1 Corinthians 13 as a guide.
 - *That great chapter on love.
 - *But my love doesn't always measure up.
 - + Sometimes my love is:
 - *Impatient.
 - *Unkind.
 - *Jealous.
 - *Selfish.
 - *Irritable.
 - + Sometimes my love:
 - *Keeps score.
 - *Keeps a record of wrongs.
 - d. Only perfect love is God's love.
 - Love that sends a savior.
 - Love that endures the cross.
 - Love that empties the tomb.
 - Love that feeds us:
 - #With bread and wine.
 - #With faith to believe.
 - #With courage to go and tell.

5. For some that's almost second nature.
 - a. My wife Pam is not a trained evangelist.
 - b. But when a neighbor comes across the street to introduce himself.
 - She can offer him a beer in one breath.
 - Invite him to church in the next.
 - c. When we go into Sears to buy a washer and dryer.
 - Sales clerk can tell Pam:
 - #She had retired a year ago.
 - #But then her husband died unexpectedly.
 - *And she had to come back to work.
 - Pam offers to pray for her.
 - d. When we go into the bank to open a checking account.
 - Pam can turn the grand inquisition:
 - #Social security number.
 - #Address.
 - #Phone.
 - Into an occasion to share more information:
 - #We live just a few blocks over this way.
 - #And our church is just two blocks up Lewis.
 - #Why don't you come and join us sometime?
 - e. She's a natural.
6. Some folks might need a little more help.
 - a. There is help for you this morning.
 - b. When you come to the communion rail.
 - To receive the Lord's body and blood.
 - c. Stop first at the font.
 - Not only can you dip your finger into the water.
 - #To remind yourself of your baptism.
 - In the font this morning are some small stones.
 - #I invite you to take one.
 - *As a reminder:
 - +Stone that has been rolled away.
 - +Grave that is empty.
 - +New life:
 - =Love.
 - =Forgiveness.
 - Springs forth from the grave.
 - *But I hope you don't:
 - +Stuff it in your pocket.
 - +Drop it in your purse.
 - +Put it in your jewelry box.
 - +Leave it on your night stand.
 - +Cram it into a drawer full of junk.

- #I want to challenge you to give it away.
 - *Friend.
 - *Neighbor.
 - *Classmate.
 - *Co-worker.
 - *Someone at the grocery store.
 - *Someone at the bank.
 - *Former member of Ascension.
 - *Present member of Ascension.
 - +Whom you haven't seen for awhile.
- #Give them the stone.
 - *Tell them where it came from.
 - *Tell them what it means.
 - *Use it an opportunity.
 - +To share your faith.
 - +To invite someone:
 - =To come and worship with us.

Concl: When you do that.

- You will write another ending to the Gospel.

- #In fact, it won't be an ending at all.

- #It will simply be:

- *Another chapter.

- *A new beginning.

- *An ongoing celebration of Easter.

Alleluia!

Christ is Risen!