

**Our Never Ending Story**  
**John 20:1-18**  
**Preached by Preached by Rev. Dr. Harry Cahill**  
**Babcock Presbyterian Church**  
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Of the four gospels John's Easter morning story is my personal favorite because it's both fast paced and up beat. With the disciples trying to outrun each other to the tomb and Mary Magdalene encountering the Risen Christ in the garden, you can sense the doom and gloom of Good Friday being shined away by the light of Christ's resurrection.

On the other hand, my least favorite resurrection story is Mark's and compared to the other three gospels, it's a real downer. Let's compare Mark's reading with John's: *"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. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. They had been saying to one another, 'Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?' When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. 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. 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.' 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."*

This time Mary and her companions go to the tomb worried they wouldn't be able to roll away the heavy stone so they could quickly get in and get out to anoint Jesus' body, only to find the stone had already been rolled away and a young man dressed in white saying, "Don't be afraid, Christ is risen, go tell the others to meet him in Galilee where he's already waiting for you."

The women's reaction? Understandably shock and awe. Mark reports, "They fled the tomb, for terror and amazement seized them and they said nothing to anyone because they were afraid."

Can you blame them? I know if I went back to visit the grave of a friend who just died only to find the casket dug up, opened and empty with some guy dressed in a white suit saying, "Everything's cool, Man, go tell your friends he's alive and waiting for you back at your house!" I'd run away too and not back to my house.

So, it's no surprise the Church's assigned gospel reading for Easter morning rarely, if ever, includes Mark's account of Christ's resurrection and yet Mark's still speaks to us in a unique and powerful way. Maybe Matthew, Luke and John do a better job capturing the "Easter Spirit," but Mark compels us to acknowledge our doubts and fears even as the Spirit moves us to claim and celebrate Christ's resurrection.

Many Bible scholars, both liberal and conservative agree Mark's gospel originally ended with that unsettling verse, "So they...fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid." These same scholars believe someone very early on in Mark's community, dissatisfied with Mark's abrupt ending, added a few more verses in keeping with the other three gospels affirming Christ's resurrection.

However, even before someone added that longer ending, Mark already covered all the bases. Mark is very clear: the tomb was empty, an angel proclaimed, "He is risen!" and the disciples were told Jesus was already at an undisclosed location in Galilee waiting for them to catch up with him. But since there were no reported definitive, personal encounters with the Risen Christ, like Mary's in the Garden, or the two disciples on the Road to Emmaus, somehow Mark's ending was unfairly judged to be incomplete and therefore troubling.

But what's wrong with that? Maybe Mark didn't go for the conclusive happy ending to make an important point: what happened on Easter morning isn't the end of the story, but only the beginning. In other words, the story of Christ's resurrection continues to unfold and impact the world, first through the apostles, then through each succeeding generation of believers and now through us.

Of course unlike Mary and her friends, we have the advantage of hindsight. We're familiar with the stories of the Risen Christ making breakfast on the beach for his disciples, and the Doubting Thomas putting his hands through Christ's wounds. But these stories are not static events, that happened long ago and far away, instead they are templates that repeat themselves one way or another, day to day, in each of our lives.

You may be familiar with the word template if you have a computer. A template is a file that serves as a starting point for your new documents. But in the broader sense a template is a model for making comparisons.

The resurrection stories in the gospels are templates or models that are synonymous with our stories, as we ourselves encounter the presence of the Risen Christ in our here and now.

Remember what the young man in white, sitting in the empty tomb said to Mary and her companions after telling them, "Jesus of Nazareth...has been

raised.” He went on to say, “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.” (Mark 16:6-7)

Why Galilee? That’s where they grew up, raised their families and made their livings. Galilee is where they first met Jesus and answered his invitation to “Follow me and I will make you fishers of men.”

Likewise your Galilee is your home, your neighborhood, your workplace. Your Galilee is where you experience your best and worst of times and where you have opportunities to love and be loved, serve and be served. Your Galilee is where you draw strength and hope and face down your doubts and fears. Your Galilee happens to be wherever you are and whatever you’re feeling at any given moment. Above all your Galilee is where you meet Jesus.

The young man in white said, “...he is risen and going ahead of you to Galilee.”

Take that to mean, Christ is going ahead of you, to your next doctor’s appointment, your job interview, that dreaded meeting with your boss. Christ is already there waiting for you, never leaving you alone and forgotten. Wherever you go, whatever you do, Christ is already there to show the way, comfort your spirits, heal your wounds and raise you up. You see, resurrection isn’t just for the dead, it’s especially for the living!

Try to imagine what our world would be like if Easter never happened and Christ wasn’t waiting in Galilee. The skeptic would argue, “Even if his resurrection is true, what’s the difference? There’s still wars and hunger, sickness and death.” The believer could only answer, “You’re correct, there are still wars and hunger, sickness and death. Jesus never said there wouldn’t be these things. But my faith informs me Christ is already there in the middle of it, rising up from human misery and bringing to those who need him the most the grace to endure and the rest of us the grace to go and be with them as we are called.

So you see, the Easter story never ends because the story continues through us. It becomes our story as we find our way to the empty tomb and like those before us face our futures, not knowing how everything will turn out, but living with hope, because Christ is risen!

So, the Gospel of Mark’s ending seems to end with an atmosphere of uncertainty and fear as the Paschal mystery just begins to unfold. But maybe Mark’s open-ended ending compliments these uncertain times we live in and blesses us with the assurance that whatever confronts us, at any given moment, we can hope, because the Risen Christ is waiting for us in Galilee.

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Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. If you believe in me, though you are dead, yet shall you live. If you believe in me, you shall not perish, but have eternal life. Do you believe this?"

Then live you life as if you do for Christ and his Kingdom. Amen