

Christ Church + Washington Parish
The Rev. Cara Spaccarelli
Easter Sermon 2018
Mark 16:1-8

Happy Easter! Most of you know what to expect when you came here this morning. Crowded pews. Dressed-up kids. Sounds of brass and more alleluias than the song Uptown Funk. And you know how this is going to a end - in about 40 minutes, we'll all be on the front lawn watching kids hunt for Easter eggs. and the smallest among us either smile or cry at the sight of the Easter bunny in all his glorious furriness. It's nice to know what's going to happen next . . . how things are going to wrap up. So nice, in fact, that I once outlawed a tv show for its failure to properly wrap things up. The culprit was the children's cartoon, Thomas the Tank Engine. On a rare occasion when I watched an entire episode, I was perturbed - Emily and Henry, two minor characters in this railway drama, were having a fight. Then the show ended. The conflict was not over. They pulled into the station and the credits started rolling. The next Thomas episode that followed did not pick up where the last one ended. Sure my children were not bothered by the lack of resolution in these trains' lives but I was. I like my shows with nice, clear endings.

Which is the Easter story in the gospel of Mark this morning causes me a bit of consternation. The gospel of Mark is famous for its unresolved ending. It's what we read for the gospel - just now. That's the end of it. The empty tomb and the women running away in fear and amazement saying nothing to anyone. Now Mark is the first gospel written. Think about that - the first gospel written says nothing about the risen Jesus. And he doesn't write a sequel either. The other three subsequent gospel writers make Jesus' resurrection clear with lots of post-tomb appearances. Mark's ending made Christian leaders so uncomfortable that a few hundred years

later, they added another 11 verses to Mark - a second ending that includes not one, not two, but three separate instances of Jesus appearing to his disciples. A proper ending.

But the original writer did not want a “proper” ending - he didn’t want to end the story for us.

These three women showed up at Jesus’ grave with only one question on their minds - who was going to roll away the stone. The women thought they knew how this story ended. But they didn’t. When that became clear, when the tomb was empty, and they realized they didn’t know how this story ended, that was the opening for God to work in them. Writer Rebecca Solnit in her influential book, *Hope in the Dark*, notes the beginning of hope - “hope locates itself in the premises that we don’t know what will happen and that in spaciousness of uncertainty is room to act.” (xiv)

Faced with the uncertainty of the empty tomb, the women have a choice to hope Jesus rose from the dead. And if they choose to hope this, they must also choose to act in that hope. And they do. They do tell the disciples. They do “go back to Galilee” - go back to the teachings of Jesus and start living them in their lives. They act in compassion, they share what they have, they forgive, they love, and they preach the good news of the power of life over the forces of death. We know this because Christianity wouldn’t still be around if they hadn’t shared what they saw and did something in their lives because of it.. In their living, Christ lived on. The ambiguous ending - the lack of clarity of the empty tomb - gave them the room to act in hope and see Christ live on in them.

Mark leaves us on a cliffhanger ending, and it is in responding to the unknown of the empty tomb, that we become a part of the ending. The empty tomb gives us the spaciousness of certainty that invites us to act and in acting we see the resurrection made real and viewable in the world. You don't know how this story ends, but you can be part of it ending in resurrected life.

You don't know how this story ends. The one you are in now.

Home life dictated by adolescent drama or a mid-life crisis or, lucky you, both - you don't know how this story ends.

Polar ice caps are melting, a single man can kill dozens of unsuspecting people, too many countries on the brink of war to count, too many investigations to warrant trusting anyone in leadership- you don't know how this story ends.

Stressed out by caring for aging parents from far away. Stuck in a job that is too much work with too little impact - you don't know how this story ends.

Wondering if you have any real friends you can count on. Know you have far less days ahead of you than behind you - you don't know how this story ends.

Weighed down by the intractable cultural conflicts in our country that are costing people their lives and wondering if your grandchildren will be fighting the same battles - you don't know how this story ends.

Everything is fine, but if only you could meet the right person, or know that you'd be financially secure, or find a different job, or figure this one thing out - you don't know how this story ends.

And in admitting that we don't know how this story ends, we have the opportunity to see that we can make a difference in the ending. What we say. What we do. It can change the outcome. Sure, not every time will it make a difference in a way that we can see. Chaos and the cross may be a part of the story and some stories take longer to finish. Longer than our lifetimes even.

Mark doesn't write the ending of the story. Your boss doesn't write the ending of the story.

Institutional racism doesn't write the ending of the story. Your bank account doesn't write the ending of the story. Your family doesn't write the ending of the story. The government doesn't write the ending of the story. In the empty tomb, God is inviting you to write the ending of the story. We all face the empty tomb and have to decide – how will we be part of the ending of this story?

If we follow the mystery man in the tomb's advice and return to Galilee, remember all that Jesus taught, living in hope in the face of an unclear ending takes shape - forgive, love, act compassionately, be generous, be merciful, stand up for justice, pray, judge not, reach out across our differences - In doing so, Christ lives on. The resurrection is made real and visible in the world. We don't do it alone. Jesus in this world doesn't rely on any one of us and yet relies on every one of us.

Teresa Avila, the 15th century mystic said it best.

“Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body. Christ has no body now on earth but yours.”

We face the same empty tomb together.

You don't know the end of the story, so be Christ's hands and feet.

you may be what the world needs to see the triumph of life over death.