

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"

But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.

"Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, 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.'"

Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

Open Cadence

What would you think if the Gospel of Mark ended right there? It would be unexpected, wouldn't it, unexpected and unsatisfying? You should know that some of the oldest manuscripts of this Gospel end right there. Most scholars, including most conservative scholars, agree that Mark ended his Gospel with verse 8.

If your Bible is like mine, it includes verses 9-20, but it says, "The two most reliable early manuscripts do not have Mark 16:9-20." (NIV, 1984) If you don't think it's right to leave out verses 9-20, it's okay. You won't go wrong. And who knows? Next year, scholars may change their minds and say that Mark wrote those verses. Be at peace!

And be patient with me. I think the original gospel ended with verse 8. Scholars have influenced me greatly, of course, but I don't want to talk about that. I want to give you an artistic reason for accepting verse 8 as the end of the Gospel of Mark.

I have asked (Ruth Ann, Michael) to help me. She will play first what musicians call a closed cadence. (She plays.) Very satisfying! We feel the resolution. We know we are at the end of a musical idea. Now, she will play what musicians call an open cadence. (She plays.) Oh, please! Don't stop! What comes next? Keep going. I can't stand it. It's very unsatisfying, isn't it? An open cadence is like the dove in Noah's ark. It needs a branch to land on, but it hasn't found one.

The Gospel of Mark ends with an open cadence. This story needs to keep going. It needs a satisfying ending. We need it to have a satisfying ending, but Mark didn't give us one. Mark ended his Gospel with an open cadence, and the people who come after have to write a closed cadence with their lives.

For example, verse 8 says: **Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.** There were three women. Verse one told us their names: **Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome.**

Those women did not lack courage. They witnessed the horror of the crucifixion. Then they pulled themselves together and made firm plans to do what Joseph of Arimathea did not have time to do before laying Jesus' body to rest on Good Friday. Verse 2 tells us they met each other and went together to the burial site at sunrise. That

had to be spooky and distasteful, but their devotion to Jesus overcame their fears, and off they went.

It is odd, isn't it? They overcame their fears to visit the dead, and with news of the living their fears overcame them. But that was a momentary lapse, wasn't it? Trembling and bewilderment would not have the last word with them. They would go away, collect their thoughts, talk it through, and come to levelheaded conclusions. "We can't keep quiet. We have to tell somebody what we saw this morning." "Yes, and Jesus wasn't there. Maybe somebody stole the body, or maybe that young man was right. Either way, we have to tell someone." "That young man also said Jesus wanted to see His disciples again in Galilee. That's crazy, but we have to tell someone." Doing what the young man told them to do is how they would help to write a closed cadence to Mark's Gospel with their lives. It is reasonable to hope they did it. We will keep our ear to the ground for any news of what they did after their fear wore off. Maybe Matthew, Luke, or John can fill in the gaps for us.

Open Tomb

Let's think about another piece of information at the unsatisfying, inconclusive end of the Gospel of Mark. The young man dressed in a white robe said to the women: **"Don't be alarmed. You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See (for yourself) the place where they laid him."** (Mark 16:6)

That's it? The decisive event in the long history of earth just happened, and that's all he can say? We want to know: "What happened? How did it happen? What does it mean? If He's alive, why is He going to Galilee? Why not go back to the authorities and say, "Gotcha! Now we are going to do things my way. What's a resurrection for, if you don't use it to put things right. What does a person do when he rises from the dead? Will Jesus talk to us about all this?"

The Gospel of Mark raises questions the Gospel of Mark doesn't answer. It doesn't spoon-feed us with obvious answers. It doesn't give us any answers. Maybe Mark was of the educational opinion that we cannot properly learn until we have been sufficiently irritated. Unanswered questions about important matters irritate us greatly.

Mark's unsatisfying report of the resurrection of Jesus Christ has two benefits. First, it prepares us to listen, when the apostles of the Church teach the meaning of the resurrection of Christ. Mark makes us thirsty. Peter, Paul, James, and John satisfy our thirst with their incomparable teaching

There is a second benefit to Mark's open cadence. It prompts you to ask, "So what? What difference does the resurrection of Jesus make in my life?" Well, does it give you hope? (See 1 Peter 1:3) Does it give you courage to face death? (Acts 21:13) Does it make you determined to serve Christ? (1 Corinthians 15:58) Does it alter the moral decisions you make? (Romans 6:11-13) Does it make you accountable to Christ for the way you live your life? (2 Corinthians 5:10) Does it make you determined to spread the good news about Jesus Christ to every person on the planet and to disciple His followers? (Matthew 28:20)

Answering "Yes" to those questions gives every generation of Christians a hand in making Mark's open cadence into a closed cadence. Here are two startling examples you might have missed. Nepal sits up on the roof of the world in the Himalayan Mountains. Last year, "state-run Radio Nepal aired Christian programs for the first time," and "Christians among the Lorung Rai, a Tibetan people group in Nepal, are reviving leaf

blowing music” and putting it at the heart of their worship songs. (*Christianity Today*, June 2014, 17) And Christians in Qufu, China, the birthplace of Confucius, are planning to build a “multimillion-dollar megachurch” two miles from the “long-standing Confucius Temple.” (*Ibid.*, 21) The young man dressed in white inside Jesus’ empty tomb didn’t say much, but what he said triggered a *tsunami* of good news that shows every sign of changing the world.

Open Heart

Let’s think about a third piece of information at the unsatisfying, inconclusive end of Mark’s Gospel. The young man dressed in a white robe gave the women one task to do. **“Go, tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.’”**

Like sand in an oyster, like a pebble in your shoe, like a hangnail that hurts, two words cannot be avoided: **and Peter. “Go, tell his disciples and Peter.”** Peter was His disciple. Peter was one of the three disciples closest to Jesus. Peter may have been the acknowledged leader of the pack. **“And Peter”** demotes him, even excludes him.

Peter and his brother, Andrew, were the first disciples. Peter rebuked Jesus for His defeatist talk about suffering and being rejected and being killed at the hands of the authorities. (Mark 8:31-32) Peter refused to let Jesus wash his feet at the Last Supper, and when Jesus said, **“You have no part with me,”** Peter said, **“Then, Lord, not just my feet but my hands and my head as well.”** (John 13:6-9)

When Jesus said, **“You will all fall away,”** Peter said, **“Even if they all fall away, I won’t.”** And when Jesus said, **“I tell you the truth, today – yes tonight – before the rooster crows twice you yourself will disown me three times.”** To which Peter heatedly replied, **“Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.”** (Mark 14:27-31)

Devoted. Hotheaded. Brave. Foolish. Self-assured. Self-deceived. Type A. Can do guy. Let’s roll! From that list circle all that apply, and you have Peter. The big fisherman was larger than life in the hamlets of first century Galilee. He knew better than Jesus what Jesus was all about and didn’t hesitate to say so.

Events early on the morning of Good Friday would have crushed a lesser man. He did run away when the police came for Jesus. But he caught himself. He remembered his determination not to run away, and he turned around and went back right into the courtyard of the high priest. He even sat with the guards around the fire. (Mark 14:54) He was Peter, and he was no coward. How could he know that he would be undone by a nosy housemaid?

She recognized him as a follower of Jesus, and she pointed him out. He denied it and left the comfort of the fire and the uncomfortable company of the guards and made his way to the exit door. The pesky woman saw him there and announced for all to hear that he was a follower of the prisoner, Jesus. He denied it again. That early-morning crowd, eager for some action, knew he was lying. His accent gave him away. **“You are a Galilean, we knew it the minute you opened your mouth.”** (Mark 14:70)

Then Peter hit rock bottom. **He began to call down curses on himself; and he swore to them, “I don’t know this man you’re talking about.” Immediately the rooster crowed the second time. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken**

to him: “Before the rooster crows twice you will disown me three times.” And he broke down and wept. (Mark 14:71-72)

“**Go, tell his disciples and Peter,**” said the young man on Easter Sunday Morning, seeming to demote him, even to exclude him from the circle of Jesus’ disciples. Peter had excluded himself, hadn’t he? However, in Mark’s open cadence fear did not have the last word about the three women, and the fact of Jesus’ resurrection promised to disclose its full meaning in time. We have reason to think that the fateful words “**And Peter**” also held the promise of Peter’s restoration.

Take Away

Jesus said over and over, “**The time has come. The kingdom of God is near.**” (Mark 1:15) In other words, watch Jesus, and you will see what God’s authority looks like in human life. Watch Jesus, and you will God’s priorities on display. And as Peter found out, God’s authority will contradict human authority, and His priorities will contradict our priorities

Unlikely disciples become extravagant disciples as they allow themselves to be corrected by the Lord they follow. They learn sooner or later that His thoughts are not their thoughts, and His ways are not their ways. They learn sooner or later that they are doing Him no favors by following Him. He is pouring out the new wine of heaven. It remains to be seen, if His disciples then and His disciples now are wineskins that can stretch and not split under the pressure of His expanding presence in their experience.

The One who brought the presence of God into the place of the dead and discarded death is here with us in our reading of the Gospel of Mark. He said to them and He says to us, “Watch me, and you will see what God is like. God is with you. Don’t miss Him!”

We won’t miss Him, if we keep in step with the Holy Spirit. We keep in step with the Spirit, when we restore gently someone who is caught in a sin, the way the Lord restored Peter. (Galatians 6:1; John 21) How would you treat Peter when you learned what he did in the courtyard of the high priest? Churches are full of people, or maybe it’s better to say: churches are all too empty of people, who, like Peter, have failed in ways for which they can’t forgive themselves. They can’t face themselves. They can’t face their friends at church.

Who will go to them and say, “We want you to be with us. Today, you need us. Tomorrow any one of us may need you. Let’s just stick together and help each other.” Your experience may contradict what I am about to say; but I think pastors do this remarkably well. We have been so battered by the public disgrace of so many fellow pastors, and we have become so sensitive to how weak we are that we just want to help.

What we need more than anything at the present moment is for men and women like you to find their friends who feel like failures and say to them, “We want you to be with us. Today, you need us. Tomorrow any one of us may need you. Let’s just stick together and help each other.” Would you give that message to someone who needs it? This week if possible?