

EASTER SUNDAY
MARCH 27, 2016

FIRST, MARSHALL
PASTOR SCOTT FULLER

PSALM 118:1-2, 14-24; MARK 16:1-8
The Unfinished Story

Dear friends in Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prepare our hearts, Lord, to receive your Word. Silence in us any voice but your own that in hearing we may believe and in believing we may obey your will revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Amen.



It was early in the day...
another terrible morning...
following another sleepless night...
after the awful events of this week now called Holy.
They had seen their teacher, their Lord, their friend Jesus **taken**...
from the comfort of his company to the cruelty of the cross.

Eyes swollen, hearts broken, dreams dead and buried,
the three women gird-up their grief-stricken spirits...
harness their heavy, hurting hearts...
and make their way to the tomb...
of the One in whom they had dared to place their hope.

It's their final act of love – there is, literally, **nothing else** to be done. They only wonder who might help them move the stone blocking the crypt, the only barrier barring them from bathing and blessing the bruised, beaten body of their rabbi.

But suddenly, their plans and the stone are quickly forgotten – lost in a whirlwind of mind-numbing news.



As they stoop to enter the tomb, they're surprised to see sitting there – a young man dressed in white – who scares them half to death. His greeting of peace doesn't help – *at all!*

Do not be afraid, he says...,
as if that would quiet the bass-drum beating of their hearts.

Jesus has been raised,
the messenger continues...which causes them to be all the more
confused.

Then, after turning their world upside down and inside out,
he gives them an assignment...
as if their shock-shaken spirits could make sense of anything.
Go and tell the others that Jesus will meet you in Galilee...
and there his message to the women ends.

That's it – no other word of assurance, no explanation of how Jesus' bloody crucifixion could have had such a radically different conclusion – just *go and tell*...

Well, their *fight-or-flight* instinct kicks into high gear –
and away they run, says the author...
for terror and amazement had seized them;
and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid (Mark 16:8).

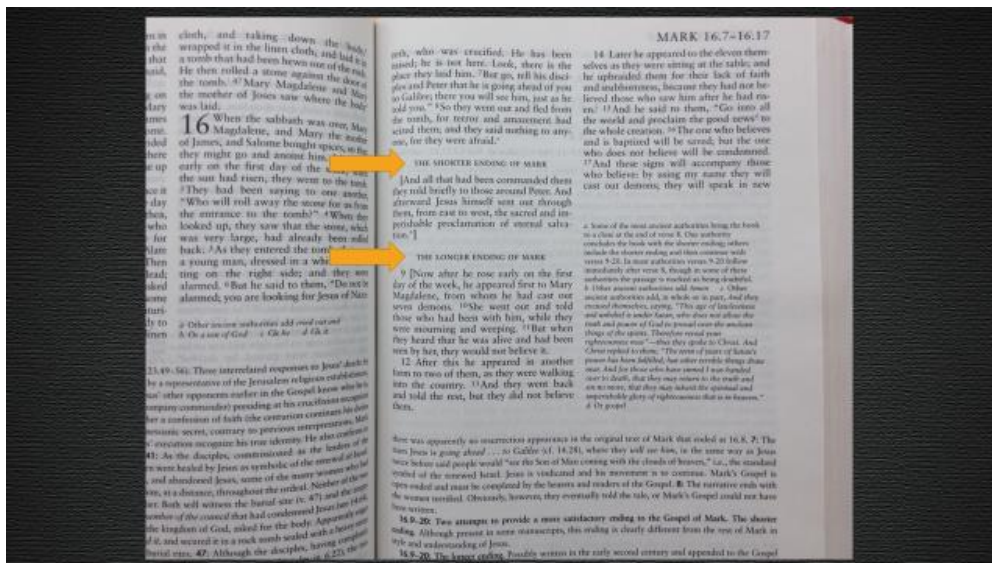
There you have it – the official end of Mark's Gospel – his breathless story about Jesus in all of its startling, astonishing, and shocking shortness...

... they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid...

You may ask, **WHAT KIND OF AN ENDING IS THAT?**

And in so doing, you would join the legions of students and scholars, preachers and teachers who have been seeking an answer to that question for ages.

If you look at the screen, you'll see that there are actually 3 endings to Mark's gospel...



You can just picture someone reading it for the first time, and saying, *We can't have the story end with the women running from the empty tomb in scared silence!!* So early on the church tried to *fix* this *problem*...twice!!

Two different times more traditional endings were added to Mark's story – but it only takes a second to notice that the language, the tone, the voice of these other writers are very different from everything that came before.

And that, of course, leaves us holding a big bag of questions:

*Was Mark interrupted in his work?
Did something happen to him before he could finish it?
Did he get up to make a sandwich and then simply forgot that
wasn't quite done with his little project?*

Or...

*Could it be that this is exactly how he meant for the story to end –
a cliff-hanger of cosmic proportions?*

No one knows the real answer to our question, but I kind of like to think that Mark intended the story to end with those unsettling words: *they...fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.*

Here's one reason why I think that's the case. The minute I'm left holding this greatest story ever told with that worst ending ever imagined, I feel almost compelled to stand up and say,

*Now hold on a second, there's a lot more to talk about, right?
That's not the end of the story.
Death did not triumph over God, and Jesus didn't just disappear.
And, obviously the women didn't keep silent for long –
we're all living proof of that!*

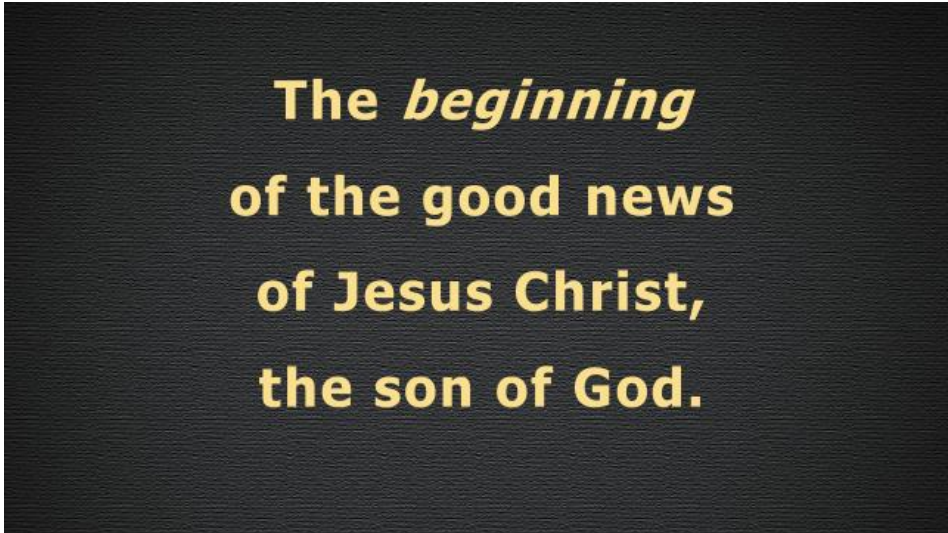
And as I get more riled up, and convicted, and eager to set the record straight, to tell that old, old story of Jesus and his love...

...I picture the gospel writer Mark, up in heaven, with a big smile on his face...he slaps his leg, lets out a hearty laugh and says, ***that's exactly what I was hoping would happen!***

Death...fear...silence...that's no ending for the good news of Jesus Christ. It's an unfinished story...and it's never completed until you and I write our stories with God's.

And here's one more clue as to why I think this might be exactly what Mark intended. Here's the opening line of his gospel. He writes:

*The **beginning** of the good news of Jesus Christ, the son of God.*



**The *beginning*
of the good news
of Jesus Christ,
the son of God.**

How can you have an ending to the beginning of a story – especially when it’s meant to include your story, and mine, and that of every person who will ever live.

So here’s the good news of this beautiful Easter morning – we know the end of the story, we know that the women did not keep silent for long.

You and I are living proof of how God helped them overcome their fear. You and I are living proof of how God helps us overcome our fears.

And you and I are living proof of how God continues to write heaven’s story of life, love, grace and faith – for we are all part of this greatest story ever told – the unfinished story of Jesus and his love.

The Gospel writer, Mark, has placed in your hands and in mine, the job, the joy, the jubilant task of telling the world the rest of this

story. So let's begin right here, right now. Let's join once more in our three-fold greeting and give Mark the pleasure of hearing us share the true ending of his story. Please stand as you're able.

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! (X3)

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

Amen.