

Setting – apologies to:

1. Clement Clark Moor, the author of “’Twas the night before Christmas”
2. The Gospel writer Mark, as you will soon see and
3. The author of *Green Eggs and Ham*, simply because whenever I try to write something poetic – I start channeling Dr. Seuss!!!

The original ending of Mark’s Gospel is a mystery for the ages. Here are last words that the author wrote (Mark 16:8)

The women fled from the tomb for terror and amazement had seized them and they said nothing to anyone for they were afraid...

That’s it – that’s the end of Mark’s Gospel, and it leaves us with a bunch of questions, right. The same was true for the early church – in fact, in your bible you should find two alternate endings that were added later, added by people like you and me who would say – that’s a terrible place to end this greatest story ever told!

And I wonder if that wasn’t Mark’s plan all along. When we finish a story, a fable, a poem that ends “*and they all lived...(say it with me) happily ever after...*” we’re left with a nice, warm feeling.

I’m thinking that Mark wasn’t content to let the story of Jesus’ death and resurrection simply warm our hearts. I think he wanted to provoke us to jump out of our chairs and shout, ***That can’t be how the story ends! We know that the women shared their experience! We know that they all saw Jesus in those days after the resurrection! We know that he sent them out into the world to share the good news of God’s grace with everyone! You and I are proof of that!!!***

And I picture Mark sitting in heaven listening to our passionate proclamation that Jesus is Risen! all while wearing a big smile on his face... And if he were here right now, I think he’d wink at us and say, *That’s exactly what I wanted to happen! Go out and tell the story of Jesus’ death and resurrection so that everyone everywhere can be blessed by this truly good news!!*

So here's my addition to that wonderful story of Jesus and his love. It's called,
'Twas the Night Before Easter.

'Twas the night before Easter – and all through God's house,
Not a creature was stirring – not even a mouse!
The lilies were placed 'round the altar with care
In hopes that our members would delight in them there

But that wouldn't happen, not this year, you see...
No gathering here in such glad company.
“All people,” they told us, “Are confined to their home –
No one can gather – no one should roam!”

It's the VIRUS, you see, that's at the heart of this mess
It's causing us fear, and bringing distress.
I fumed and I fussed, but I had to agree –
It's the best thing for all to keep healthy and free.

So inside we will stay - it's the right thing to do
The best way to protect - you from me and me from you.

And then...well, it struck me – in a strange sort of way
This might help us experience that *first* Easter Day.
In a way that we'd never imagined before
We've been given a peek at that first Easter of yore.

The women awoke when it was quiet and dark,
There was no light to see, no sound of the lark.
They'd settled on doing what was right, what they ought
With their poor Master's body as the bible had taught.

Their journey was quiet, they were empty of tears...
Though their thoughts still a-tumble with a number of fears.
The stone, it soon hit them – oh what could be done?
How would they move it to honor God's Son?

Morning had come by the time they arrived –
The birds were now singing their songs of delight.
Yet the women were quiet as they came near the tomb
Theirs thoughts all still dark, their hearts filled with gloom.

But when they looked up – the stone – it had moved!
A young man sat upon it – but what did that prove?
Do not be afraid, said the man light and bright,
Jesus has risen from the dark of death's night!

*He was dead – that is true! – he was buried right here
But all of that's over – there's no need to fear.
The Lord has been raised – he's alive and he's free
Go, lead the disciples to bright Galilee!*

Well the women were shocked – had nothing to say
This is not how they pictured spending their day.
The news of Jesus alive from the dead –
It made them suspicious, it filled them with dread.

Was it one more cruel trick to cause them some pain?
Why take his body? What more would they gain?
It might be a trick – it might be a plan
To arrest all his friends – the last woman and man.

So they fled from that place – hearts heavy with fear
Their minds filled with worry for all they held dear.

... We know what it's like to be filled up with fright
When everything's wrong, when nothing feels right.
Yet that's not how God wants us living our life –
All tied up with thoughts about fear, about strife.

Thank God that's not how it all ends, you'd agree.
Else what would *I* do? Who would *you* be?
The Spirit was blessing those women, I'm sure
The news of Jesus alive was the cure.

In no time at all, over fear they prevailed
Their story they told, the facts they detailed.

And that's how it came down to you and to me,
The story of Jesus alive! Jesus free!

Now, there's much more to tell, so much more to share
About God's love and God's grace – how God truly cares!
And because of those women on that first Easter Day
You and I are all free to speak, serve and pray.

Are we ever afraid? Do we ever have fear?
Do we worry sometimes that God is not near?

Absolutely, of course! That's all very true –
But that's not what God wants – for me or for you!
God wants us to live with our hearts fully free
To speak of Christ's love for the world – don't you see?

So in these days of confusion – with pain and with fear
Think back to those women who bravely drew near
To the tomb of their Lord, where they knew he was dead
His body entombed, his last earthly bed.

Then think of them after they'd all left in fear
Not wanting to speak, not able to cheer.
Think of them later when they finally were bold
And to the disciples – their story they told.

It's a story of life, of love and of grace
Of God's great delight to see joy on your face
And on mine – and on everyone's face far and near
Jesus is living – his love for us clear.

This Easter I pray that your hearts are content
As we eagerly close out this season of Lent.
Be strong and courageous, and be of good cheer
For Jesus is with us, his Spirit is near. Thanks be to God. Amen.