

## *Go ... and Tell*

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*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. 2And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. 3They had been saying to one another, 'Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?' 4When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. 5As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. 6But 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. 7But 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.' 8So 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. - Mark 16:1-8*

Each of the four gospels in the New Testament gives us a first look at the resurrection of Jesus. Each account is distinctive, not only in tone and substance but also in what follows — how the author builds on the resurrection premise.

Consider, for instance, the initial resurrection scene in the Gospel of Matthew, heard at our Vigil last night. It is arguably the most dramatic: *a great earthquake* (unique to Matthew) takes place as the women arrive at the tomb, after which (also unique to Matthew) they apparently *see* the tombstone rolled away by a *mighty angel* whose *appearance was like lightning*. (Matt. 28:2-3)

The initial resurrection scene in the Gospel of Luke arguably includes the most immediate and conclusive interpretation of what has happened. Inside the empty tomb, the women's expectations are turned upside down by two dazzlingly clad men: *Why do you look for the living among the dead?* These apparent angels then recite a succinct but fully developed credal formula: *He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you ... that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.* (Luke 24:6-7)

The initial resurrection account in the Gospel of John is arguably the most intimate. Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb alone. Jesus appears and speaks to her, but she only recognizes him when he says her name: *Mary*. Flooded with recognition, and no doubt love, she answers, *Rabbouni! Teacher!* She reaches for him, but Jesus urges her physical restraint, for now.

And then there's the initial resurrection scene in the Gospel of Mark, the one we have heard today. The drama is tame by comparison with the account in Matthew. Compared to Luke, the intended message is less straightforward and gives rise to more questions than answers. The messenger at the tomb in Mark is merely *a young man, dressed in a white robe*. Completely absent is the personal connection with Jesus conveyed in the Gospel of John.

But the most distinctive feature about this first look at the resurrection of Jesus as told in the Gospel of Mark is that it is also, arguably, the last and only look that we get. Many scholars have long argued that the original gospel ends here.

What a contrast to the Gospel of Matthew, where, after that first earthquake-and-angel scene, we learn of the Great Commission, to ‘*go and make disciples of all nations,*’ (Matt. 28:28a) after which – the final verse in Matthew – Jesus promises his disciples: ... *remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.* (Matt. 28:30b) After the initial resurrection scene in Luke, we walk alongside two unnamed followers on the Road to Emmaus. Although Jesus walked with us all day, we did not recognize him until an amazing moment that evening, just as he blessed and broke bread. And then more appearances to others, including those who, at the end, saw Jesus *carried into heaven.* (Luke 24:13-53). John takes us behind locked doors in an upper room where Jesus appears to them and imparts the Holy Spirit to them by way of his breath, and then, later, of course, doubting Thomas, and more. (John 20:11ff)

Mark gives us none of any of this, or anything else. It is true that any Bible you pick up will show more verses in the Gospel of Mark after this point, but look more closely and you’ll see the footnotes. Some translations even include two alternative endings to this gospel. But many commentaries explain what the footnotes suggest – these longer endings were likely later additions to this gospel.

Remove these endings, and we’re left with today’s account and where it ends. It ends with the word *afraid*. Not only that, there’s an awkward disconnect in the final moments. The white-robed messenger at the empty tomb directs the women to *go* and to *tell ... go, tell his disciples ... that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him ...* The women do in fact *go*: ... *they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them ...* But they did not *tell*. .. *they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid*. Adding to the peculiarity, this gospel apparently ends with no one having seen Jesus resurrected. The messenger only claims that they *will* see him, in Galilee, if they go there.

In light of these features in Mark’s first and only resurrection account, it’s no surprise that worried later believers thought this gospel needed a more compelling, more believable ending, and they added to it.

According to one school of thought, these later additions were needed because an original ending of this gospel, penned by the original author, must have been lost. It’s a plausible theory if one recalls that this text was first written on a scroll. The end of the story would have been on the outermost rolls of the scroll. So, maybe some dazzling and more comfortably resolved ending to the Gospel of Mark was lost due to wear and tear on the author’s primordial scroll.

But let’s imagine for now that the original author *did* end the story here, exactly in this way, and let’s imagine the author meant to end this gospel without anyone having seen Jesus resurrected. What if, by way of this reserve and dissonance, the author was aiming to prompt resurrection accounts from future believers? And if so, where, and how have any of us seen Jesus resurrected? And what difference, if any, has it made, for us or for others? The women in this account were commanded to *tell* but ‘*they told no one.*’ What about us?

One key to the quandaries and these *what ifs?* at the end of this gospel may be found in the very first verse of this gospel: *The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ...* What if the author imagined that this entire gospel was *the beginning?* What if you and I are meant to be

the ever-seeking, ever-witnessing, ever-growing outermost rolls in the scroll, the ones who come after the beginning and who author the follow-up stories? What if you and I are meant to witness, live and write the more compelling resurrection accounts?:

*The Gospel according to Jason.*

*The Gospel of Robin.*

*The Gospel according to LaVerne.*

So - don't just sit there.

Get writing!

Go ...

... and tell.

*Amen.*