



“It is...UNFINISHED!”

(Sunday of the Resurrection, 2018)

BY PASTOR JOHN HILLMER

So it was Mary, and another Mary, and Salome - the women – who went to the tomb looking for Jesus.

They arrived at the tomb; the stone – it was rolled back. A young man inside the tomb - - an angel? – dressed in white, said **April Fools!!!! Not here!!**

Well, given the date of Easter this year that is the equivalent of what he said. But the joke is not on the women. **Not at ALL.** And the joke is not on the men either. Although where are the men? Year after year it strikes me more and more – Where WERE the men? Were they lazy? Sleeping in? Self-assured in their impeccable logic that it's over! 'We gave it our best shot, but the whole deal was just not what we thought?' Whatever and where ever the men were, the joke isn't on them either.

The joke was on the forces of the world and the powers of the world! The joke was on the powers of the 'state', the powers of control, the grandiose powers of “we will have it **our** way because there is no **other** way”. Those powers that thought they could silence the Prince of Peace, the Source of Truth. Those powers – the joke's on them. They thought they'd done it! Took care of him. Silenced the One who dared to give voice to a 'higher authority'. They shut it down –took care of it in that stone, cold tomb.

April Fools! The joke is on them.

But it's all so strange. It takes time to sink in. Was it a cruel joke? This empty tomb adding insult to injury? This strange, strange ending to the Gospel of Mark, teases our soul. There is confusion, silence, uncertainty, fear. Is that anyway to end?

“...they fled from the tomb, for terror had seized them. They said NOTHING to anyone, for they were afraid!”

You can't "end" there hanging on a cliff! It's like the "Hallelujah Chorus" with no final resolution! As hearers of the gospel of Mark, we long for an ending that strikes a major chord! A consummate resolution! A grand finale. One that ties together all the loose ends and concludes well! That sends us forth with confidence, conviction, and assurance. "Hutzpah to take on the world full of 'alleluias'!"

But there is no 'major chord' – no grand resolution -- at the end of Mark. We are left hanging in an unfinished 'fog'. And yet, the final verses of Mark's Gospel are reminiscent of some of the world's renowned compositions that never got completed. Unfinished - either because the composer ran out of inspiration or died before reaching the conclusion.

Franz Schubert – Symphony #8 in b minor – commonly called "the Unfinished".

J.S. Bach - the 'Art of fugue'.

Mahler's Symphony #10 "Unfinished"

Mozart's "Requiem"

So how "does it" end, the Gospel - the 'good news' of the Gospel? How does the Resurrection end? What did the women do? What did the men do? Where is the "And they lived happily ever after!"

Don Juel - professor of New Testament theology (BA from St. Olaf, BD from Luther Seminary and PhD from Yale) was a leading expert on the Gospels, and especially Mark. He told the story that while he was at Yale, one of his students memorized the entire Gospel of Mark and performed it before a live audience for his master's thesis. He did an amazing job and then came to the end: Verse 8 *"So 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."* He stood there waiting for applause. Nothing but awkward silence! Finally, after several anxious moments he said "AMEN!" and made his exit. The applause broke out.

Good stuff, right? But upon reflection the student concluded that by providing the audience a satisfying conclusion - his AMEN- he had actually betrayed the intention, and power of the text. So the next time he performed the Gospel, when he came to the final verse, he paused for a half-beat and simply walked off stage. The uncertainty of the audience was obvious (said Juel). As the people exited, the buzz of conversation filled the halls, and it was dominated by the non-ending, its purpose, and power.

What DO we hear in the Gospel? What DO we hear in this book, The Holy Scriptures? We hear that God's Grace restores us, and renews us! That he heals our iniquities, and

redeems our brokenness. That there is FAITH, HOPE, and HEALING for all – in God’s abundance. What do we hear? That death cannot hold God’s anointed one - Christ Jesus. That LIFE not death has the final word. And that the power of God cannot be domesticated, or buried, or silenced, or contained.

How does it end?? Well – it DOESN’T end. There is NO conclusion or end to God’s Love and Grace.

The fact that you and I are here, this morning, celebrating Christ’s Resurrection, and hearing this proclamation from Mark, is testimony to the faithfulness of God. God’s faithfulness (on the one hand) but on the other, also the faithfulness of the women and men who through the centuries since that stone was rolled away; and left the tomb, and headed to “Galilee”. Knowing that Christ goes before us and will meet us there, in our tomorrows, to finish the story of Jesus. Not by bringing it to closure, but by remaining open to God’s grace, living in his presence.

In other words WE finish the story of God’s love. In everything that you do. In that sense, it is **never** finished! When Jesus said, “It is finished” on the cross he was speaking of his suffering, and the fulfillment of God’s covenant. What is NOT finished, is the love of God in this world.

Do you know how the “Gospel of Mark” begins? Take out your Bibles! Chapter 1, verse 1, - ***“The BEGINNING of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God”***. None of the other three gospels begin that way. In Mark there’s no “genealogies”, no “historical context”, no birth of Jesus, no heavenly chorus, and shepherds in the fields, and no manger. Just -- ***“The beginning of the good news of Jesus...”***

And Mark’s gospel is clear. There is no END to it! The good news DOES NOT END. The Resurrection DOES NOT END. I can’t say it any clearer -- Easter is not about bunnies and chocolate eggs, and pretty flowers. Those things are just “gilding the lily”. Easter is about the Resurrection of Jesus Christ; and the abundance of God’s grace and power that cannot be domesticated, or contained, or packaged and marketed. We can only stand in amazement of it! Be awestruck by it. Be transformed by it.

And with that, put our lips to the greatest word which approaches such power: “ALLELUIA”. (Hebrew) Which translated means - **God be praised.**

Alleluia! Christ is Risen!!

He is risen indeed. Alleluia!