

“The Lord is our strength and our song,
The Lord has become our salvation.” AMEN!

Some of you know that I would not
have made it through the required
readings in seminary

Were it not for a strategy that
was passed down by a professor.

In a time of heartfelt candor, he said,
“Look, you will face times during seminary
when you will have a mountain of reading
to do for your professors.

All of the books are important for you
to read but perhaps not all at once!

A way to help, if you get out of a jam,
is to read the first chapter and the last chapter.”

That bit of advice saved me
more times than once.

Occasionally the first and last chapters were
so good that later I went back
to read the whole book.

Most times, the first and
last chapter was enough! :-)

This reminded me of a conversation I had
with a person once who said that they
will not read any book (fiction or non)
unless they can read how it ends first.

The argument was “If I don’t like how it ends,
then I am not going to waste my time to read it!”

Now, I don’t know if I would go that far,
because I like surprise endings but
my seminary strategy and
the conversation with that person

made me wonder about our
Easter account from Mark, today.

The ending was so abrupt that you might
think it was a bulletin misprint or pastoral error.

As if that ever happens, haha! :-)

No really, that was how the gospel, in it’s
original author form at least, ended.

“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.” [The End]

My wonder is:

would I, or the person who reads
the end first, read this and find it to be
worthy of going back
to read the whole book?

I wonder, would I find the “empty tomb”
to be enough incentive
to read the entire account?

It seems too loose!

Why isn't anyone happy?
Why didn't they go and tell anyone?

Is it because we humans want closure and proof?

We desire to be told, in as
clear language as possible,
exactly what happened.

This truth is likely why other authors
added endings to Mark's gospel.

There is a shorter ending and a longer one
that is included in your Bible but

Biblical scholars and literary experts agree
the style of theses “added” endings

do not match the style and grammar of
the original Mark.

So, why did Mark end the witness of Jesus here?

The tomb’s empty and the witnesses
runaway afraid and tell no one. (Pause)

Where’s Paul Harvey with
“The Rest of the Story?” :-)

Well, I’ll be the first to admit,
I am no Paul Harvey when it
comes to story telling, but I have learned

that Mark is very intentional with the way
he wrote about Jesus’ life and purpose.

Mark is also very intentional about what we,
the audience need to discover, and then do,
once we hear the good news.

What we discover as we encounter
Jesus in Mark is that there is almost always
a bad experience or situation first.

A person that is possessed;
a challenge to Jesus from
the religious authorities;

a storm;
a death;
a hunger;
a challenge of faith;
a worry that we are not enough.

Each important lesson in Mark
almost always begins with a bad situation
and then a question either from Jesus or
from a person or the people he rescues.

Here are just a few of them:

“What have you to do with us,
Jesus of Nazareth?”

“Why does He eat and drink
with sinners and tax collectors?”

“Who is this that even the wind
and sea obey him?”

“Why do you make a commotion and weep?”

“How many loaves do you have?”

“Who do you say that I am?”

These are just a few of the questions
presented to us in Mark and each of them
reveal to us something about Jesus.

One lesson we are to learn here is
asking questions to Jesus in our fear
and worry and misunderstandings
and curiosity is a good thing to do
when we come to Jesus with honesty,
in a desire to know the truth and
when we come in need
of His healing.

And we often will only do this
when a bad situation or challenge
comes into our life.

In other words, when we finally admit
that we are empty.

And that brings us back to the empty tomb. (Pause)

When Mary, Mary, and Salome
went to the tomb with spices to
anoint Jesus body for proper
long term burial

they went with the knowledge and understanding
that death spoiled everything.

They knew that when
you are dead,
you are dead.

They were in a bad situation,
full of grief but they had a job to do:
prepare the body for burial.

The dead Jesus, the One they saw
perform incredible miracles before their eyes,
was gone for good.

It was dark outside,
they were empty inside, and
everything had fallen apart.

And then, what happened next? (Pause)

What happened next was:
They asked a question...

“Who will roll away the stone for us?”

The stone of the tomb... yes.

Also, the stone of grief.

The stone of loss and hopelessness.
Who will roll it away? (Pause)

You do not need to be told about
being kept behind a stone.

Pandemic, economic insecurity, racial injustice,
trials of police brutality, death, stress,
and emptiness.

They are all impossible stones
to roll away by ourselves.

The simple fact that we haven't been able
to come and worship live together for
over a year is dizzying and painful.

It occurred to me that when we
do come back in large group again,
I may just stand in front of you,
breakdown and cry.

Tears of joy! Yes!

But tears just the same. :-)

That's hope in the resurrection, isn't it? (Pause)

“Who will roll away the stone for us?”

The women in Mark asked.

And we ask the question, too.

How will we find hope this Easter in the story
from Mark that ends with an empty tomb?

The first consideration from us is to allow ourselves
to see that empty is good.

In fact, for Mark, empty at the feet of Jesus
is everything.

Admittance to emptiness drives us
to fall at Jesus' feet and beg healing,
help, strength, food, and a place
to follow Him.

But, Mark is terribly honest, if we believe
that we are complete, that our lives are
exactly how they should be,

FULL in every way
then this day, Easter, and this message,
the empty tomb is not for us.

The empty tomb will simply not hit home. (Pause)

If this day is to matter for any of us

then we must find a way to break out of
faking fullness and in times of worry and
fear not do the

Can we see that the
“I can make it on my own” pep-talk
does not recognize that we are empty
people and there is joy in
the empty tomb? (Pause)

So, the first consideration for us is
to not dismiss the empty tomb.

The second is to realize that Mark ends his witness
this way on purpose.

The purpose is to tell us that the story is not over.

The work and purpose of Christ
continues yesterday, today and tomorrow.

You and I are empty and the angel tells us
to not be alarmed.

Empty at the feet of Jesus is good.

The questions throughout Mark’s gospel
have been answered and Jesus
has gone on ahead of us.

“Tell his disciples and Peter that he is
going ahead of you to Galilee.”

The place where everything started.

In Mark’s gospel everything about
Jesus started in Galilee.

Christ closes the circle and we find
what seems to be the ending at first
is really a new beginning. (Pause)

Go - leave the tomb, it is empty,
death rules no longer.

In so many words the angel moved
the women disciples first, and then the others,
to live into their new normal.

To lean into it.

The old way is disrupted and empty is good.

Even Peter, who denied Jesus at
the critical hour is included
in the gospel message.

Jesus is not in the tomb...

go you will see him
just as he told you.

Mark doesn't have to even write it
because we know they went, don't we?

They had to...

They left their fears, their guilt,
their mistakes and their misjudgments about Jesus
and they told everyone they could:

The tomb was empty and Jesus lives!

AMEN!