

Of the four accounts of the resurrection in the gospels, this one from St. Mark, which we've just heard read is my favorite, and it's also the most controversial. Maybe that's why it's my favorite, I don't know. But the controversy is about the end, the end of the gospel that we've just heard. Scholars ask, "Where does the gospel end, or where was it meant to end?" If you go and look in your Bible, you may see that there are a number of answers to this question, where does it end? The oldest manuscripts end where I just finished reading at the end of verse eight, and the majority of scholars think that this is where St. Mark intended the gospel to end, but other manuscripts, well some have at what's called a shorter ending and some have a longer ending, and these are always included in parentheses in our Bibles.

And scholars who support one of these endings being more original, they think that Mark cannot possibly have intended his gospel to end with the words, "For they were afraid." They think this is just too much of a downbeat ending, that this is not the finale to the story of Jesus that St. Mark would have intended, and maybe they think the original manuscript or the end of it has been lost or ripped off over the years. And these scholars point to the fact that the risen Jesus doesn't actually appear in these eight verses. His appearance is promised, but later in Galilee.

What we do have here is an empty tomb, an angel, and some grieving women running terrified, amazed, and afraid. Surely, the scholars say, "St. Mark meant to say more." The story needs completing, and they cite as their clinching argument the fact that the gospel doesn't just end with, "For they were afraid," but actually in the original Greek, the word "for" is the last word to appear. And as they say, you don't even end a sentence in a preposition, let alone a gospel.

This is something of a bone of contention in my house. I first met my wife, Laura, in Cambridge. It was a lovely autumn day, the first day of the academic year, and I was minding my own business walking through the courtyard when I heard a voice

from behind me cry out, "Excuse me, what is the library at?" I said, "I'm terribly sorry, but in England we try not to end sentences with a preposition." "Excuse me," she replied, "Do you know where the lab is at, you moron?"

Back to the gospel, so we're left with the question of where Mark's gospel ends. Where does it end? We've heard that question a lot recently in this year of pandemic. We've all been wondering when will it end? When will it all be over? It's dragged on for so long. Actually, I don't think it will have a clear end, I fear it's going to rumble on. I can't imagine the day when Dr. Fauci is going to stand up and declare the end of the pandemic. It will drift on and peter out eventually.

Where does it end? If you'd ask the women, Mary and the others, heading to the tomb of Jesus that first Easter morning of where the story of Jesus ends, they'd have given you a sad answer. They'd have said, "Well sadly, after all the promise, historians with the crucifixion, they weren't expecting the resurrection, they weren't expecting to meet the risen Jesus." In fact, we read as they're walking along to the tomb, they were wondering how they were going to move the large stone away from the entrance. When they got to the tomb, they were surprised to find the stone rolled away and the tomb empty, apart from the angel. And the angel says to them, "You were looking for Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified. He has been raised. He is not here. He is not here. He has been raised."

The story of Jesus did not end with the crucifixion. And I like this account in Mark's gospel of the resurrection, because to me it rings so true. Of course, the women were afraid when they heard what the angel said. One of the scariest things in the world is to believe that your deepest, most secret hopes might actually be possible. The gospel says the woman fled from the tomb for terror and amazement had seized them. Terror and amazement, the wonder, the glory of the resurrection, and the terrifying possibility that it might be true. Everything now was different. Everything was changed. They were afraid of a

world turned upside down, a world with which they weren't familiar. They were afraid of what the resurrection might mean.

Saying that Jesus of Nazareth was raised from the dead is not only a self-involving statement, it's a self-committing statement. Where does the story of Jesus end? Not with crucifixion, but with resurrection.

What about us? Where does our story end? Without the resurrection, our story ends in death. Others believe that still is the case. Stephen Hawking, the physicist said this, "I regard the brain as a computer, which will stop working when the components fail. There is no heaven or afterlife for broken down computers." Well, there might well not be a heaven for computers and I sincerely hope that there aren't computers in heaven, but I do believe that there is a heaven for God's children.

What we celebrate this Easter morning is the fact that we can give a confident answer to the question of where our story ends. Where does it end? It ends in heaven because of the resurrection, because of the new life that has been won for us through Jesus's death and resurrection, we know our story ends with the hope of heaven. The victory of Jesus over sin and death can be our victory too. We claim that victory as our own. Jesus's story did not end with the cross. So in answer to the question is death the end, we can answer with Mary and the women who went to the tomb, with Peter and the disciples that Jesus met in Galilee, and with all God's people down through the ages, with a resounding no. Our story does not end in death. We know where it ends, with the hope of heaven.

Hallelujah, Christ is risen! The Lord is risen indeed.
Hallelujah!