

The Resurrection of Our Lord Year B
Mark 16:1-8
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Baptism of Phoebe Grace Bornhuse
All Saints Lutheran, Calgary
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“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.”

Period! The end! The curtain falls and the credits roll. With these words the Gospel according to Mark finishes.

Happy Easter!

I’ve got to be honest with you this morning and say that as an ending to the story this one seems completely - well, unacceptable - a white-robed young man whispers a promise, three women flee the cemetery in terror, amazement...and silence - the END!

There are no post-resurrection appearances, no road to Emmaus, no joyful seaside meals, no garden embraces of the risen Lord, no disciples shouting, “He is risen!” Instead, this gospel ends abruptly – sharply – suddenly – unexpectedly – “for they were afraid.”

Now what kind of ending is that? That’s no way to run a resurrection! “Alleluia! Christ is risen!” and “they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid?” It is not exactly an ending that inspires great confidence.

And not only does this verse fail to provide a suitable, familiar narrative conclusion, it lurches to an awkward grammatical stop - so bear with me for just a moment this morning for a very quick grammar lesson.

In the (Koine) Greek, from which this gospel is translated, the *gar* - the word “for” in the Greek - is in the wrong place in the sentence structure - *ephobounto gar* – literally the text says: they were afraid for.

No writer of Greek in the first century would end a sentence with the word, *gar*, “for.” But the writer of this work ends not only the final sentence, but the entire gospel with the word “for” - *ephobounto gar*. A more literal translation would read, “To no one anything they said; afraid they were for.”

Now why would this writer end with the word, *gar*, “for?”

“For”, is a small, transitional word that leads into something else - it serves as a kind of hesitation, getting us ready for the next statement - it’s a throat-clearing kind of word that slows us down so that there is space for anticipation to grow for whatever is coming next.

Quite obviously chapter 16, verse 8 is not the end of Mark’s gospel.

And it wasn’t long before readers began supplying endings of their own – endings that satisfyingly showed disciples believing and obeying and celebrating the risen Lord. Editions of the Greek text and English translations usually include two of these endings, one long, the other short - check the footnote in your Bible when you get home.

Well-meaning Christians from the first centuries reasonably thought that Mark couldn’t have intended his final word to be *gar*. Maybe an arresting officer had broken in and interrupted the gospel writer working on the last page and they never had a chance to finish it. Maybe the last few inches of the scroll on which they wrote were accidentally torn off. Whatever the case, interruption, or accident, what Mark must have intended, could be easily supplied, so supply it they did.

Now, they weren’t making anything up - they were simply writing down the truth, that the resurrection of Jesus generated new life in Jesus’ followers - disciples who praised and preached and prayed the living Christ into and around the world. But as so often happens with eager, well-meaning helpers, they only got in the way. They meddled where they had no business meddling and muddied the final moment of clarity that the gospel writer so skillfully and pastorally intended in this gospel.

You see, the gospel writer intended *gar* as the final word. The *gar* leaves us in mid-stride, off balance, hanging – anticipating the next word – waiting for what is to come next.

The other foot has to come down someplace. Where will it come down? What will come next? Will this invasion of new life that completely rearranges reality for us, confronting us with more life than we had ever imagined, send us scurrying in anxious fear for cover or venturing in reverent fear into the world?

I know that you have come to this Easter morning, gathering on-line for the most part with a few in-person, in the midst of a COVID pandemic...gathering from many different places, from many different experiences, and with differing needs and concerns.

Some of you have gathered this morning because someone invited you to be here. Some of you are here because a parent woke you up and told you to grab a spot on the couch. Still others have come because you are desperately seeking community and

Easter hope and promise, and life. Still others have come wanting to sing from your home the familiar Easter hymns or to receive communion - but this morning I'm not really concerned with why you came.

What I'm concerned about is not how you have come to Easter, but the way that you will leave Easter.

You see, by ending this gospel with *gar* - the word "for" – the gospel writer is encouraging us - you and me - the reader, the listener - the 2021 disciple – the 2021 COVID pandemic disciple – to finish the story. To finish the resurrection story in our lives.

The gospel writer is encouraging us to nurture Phoebe Grace in the Christian faith. To help her to live in the covenant of baptism and in communion with the church. To be faith community for her, so that Phoebe Grace might live out of the promises made for her and to which we are each called as baptized children of God...as God's Beloved:

- To live among God's faithful people,
- To hear the word of God and share in the Lord's supper,
- To proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed,
- To serve all people, following the example of Jesus',
- And to strive for justice and peace in all the earth.

(Affirmation of Baptism, Evangelical Lutheran Worship)

Do you see what the gospel writer is doing? The gospel writer doesn't presume to write our conclusion for us, doesn't argue, doesn't push.

Instead, the writer ends by deliberately not ending, by dangling something incomplete and unsatisfying in front of us.

Instead of wrapping up this gospel as a finished product - at the last moment, the gospel writer steps aside and with the final word - *gar* - written on the paper, hands us the pen and says, "Here, you write it, you write a resurrection conclusion with your life – your daily living at home, at school, at your place of vocation, in your community. Finish this resurrection gospel in your life today!"

"Here, Phoebe Grace, you write it, you write a resurrection ending with your life."

"Here, God's Beloved...you and me...you write it, you write a resurrection ending with your life."

Alleluia! Christ is Risen. Christ is Risen, Indeed! Alleluia!

I acknowledge, with appreciation, the writings of The Rev. Dr. Thomas G. Long, The Rev. Dr. Eugene H. Peterson and The Rev. Marek Zabriskie whose wisdom and insights I have borrowed, as well as their words, in the shaping of today's sermon:

"Dangling Gospel." Thomas G. Long, *Christian Century*, April 4, 2006.

Under the Unpredictable Plant: An Exploration in Vocational Holiness.
Eugene H. Peterson, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1992.

"God Says, 'Nevertheless!'" Marek Zabriskie, Day 1, April 4, 2021.

<https://day1.org/weekly-broadcast/605a4a3f6615fb202d000060/marek-zabriskie-god-says-nevertheless>