

**Sermon**  
**5 April 2015**  
**West Kirk of Calder & Polbeth Harwood**

**By: Rev Dr Jonanda Groenewald**

**Text: Mark 16:1-8**

**Easter Sunday**

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Have you ever read a book that you really enjoyed, but then you were disappointed by the ending? In my mind a good book always have a gripping beginning and a perfect ending.

I think we all like perfect endings. Actually, sometimes I think *all* we want from life is a perfect ending. That's what we dream about, that's what we work towards. And sadly, that's why we are disappointed so often, because although perfect endings are possible in stories, these are not guaranteed in life.

So talking about books, if there were literary prizes awarded to authors of Biblical texts, I don't think Mark would have made the shortlist to receive one.

Because for starters, if you read his gospel in the original Greek text, it's quite clear that Greek is not his first language – not that I'm judging him or anything, I know very well what that feels like!!

But about that gripping beginning and perfect ending... Neither can be found in the Gospel according to Mark! Because Matthew and Luke start their Gospels with the story of the birth of Jesus, and look how that story's captured the imagination of the whole world for so many years... But Mark doesn't even mention it. He gets straight to business, he cuts to the chase and starts his Gospel where Jesus starts doing what he came to earth for.

And that ending... Nothing perfect there. In fact, I think that the Gospel according to Mark ends in consternation and perplexity! Because originally, this Gospel ended with verse 8, the last verse we read this morning: "Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid."

That's it! THE END.

So very early on the scribes couldn't live with this, having the Gospel end as it did, so they added the bit where the risen Jesus appeared to people. They knew this happened, because it was recorded in Matthew and Luke, and they just didn't think that it was appropriate that Mark didn't mention the very last things Jesus did while he was on earth.

But all this got me thinking – and I wonder if Mark didn't deliberately end his gospel in this way, because that would be more realistic to his readers? Mark doesn't give us closure, he keeps us thinking...

Very early on the Sunday morning, the women who were closest to Jesus went to the tomb where he was buried. They wanted to anoint his body with special spices. Now although this seems like quite a strange

thing to do, especially *after* he was buried already – these women wanted to pay their final respects to Jesus.

Usually a body would be anointed straight away, but because of the time at which he died, they couldn't do that. Jesus died just as the Sabbath was about to start, and nobody was allowed to do any kind of work on the Sabbath. Not even anoint a loved one's body.

So these women went to do this as soon as they could, just after sunrise on the day after the Sabbath.

Walking towards the tomb where Jesus was buried, they were worried about access to his body, because they knew that there was a huge, heavy stone in front of the entrance to the tomb.

But when they reached the place, the one thing they thought was going to cause them tremendous difficulty, all of a sudden wasn't a problem at all! Because to their great surprise, the stone was rolled away already!

Now they had an even greater challenge to face! Their world was turned upside down by that stone that was rolled away, because all of a sudden nothing made sense anymore.

A young man in a white robe very calmly told them that Jesus has risen from the dead, and that they had to go tell Peter and the other disciples.

But what did they do? They got a fright and they ran away.

That's *not* how the story ends – because we read in Matthew and Luke how they eventually told the disciples what happened, how the disciples went back to see for themselves and how they all met the risen Jesus later. So that's not where the *story* ends, but that's where Mark stops writing.

Why? Maybe because a woman's testimony didn't carry any weight in those days in any case? Maybe because they were scared that something was going to happen to them, that the authorities might accuse them of tampering with Jesus' body? Or maybe because Mark wanted to remind us that all this really happened. That it wasn't just a story with a perfect ending.

That these women were real people who were by no means perfect. They were scared. They didn't know what to do. They didn't know what to think or what to believe. They were confused. They were shocked.

So the ending to the Gospel according to Mark is not perfect. But you know what?

I think that's a good thing! I think it reminds us that we shouldn't allow expectations to rule our lives.

The women expected to find the body of Jesus. Instead they found an empty tomb. Something they never expected to find. A completely unexpected turn of events. But in a good way! Although, they didn't realise this straight away. They needed time to get to grips with what happened to them at that tomb.

Maybe Mark is trying to teach us that we shouldn't expect a perfect ending. Because in the end things will always work out the way they should, but that might not be the way we thought it was going to be...

And that's a scary thought, confusing and bewildering, but real.

Jesus didn't come to earth to give all of us that perfect ending to our story. Because things happen to us that we don't understand. We get unwell, we get left behind, we get misunderstood, we feel alone, we worry, we get hurt...

And all these things still happen to us, even though we believe in Jesus. Jesus didn't come to give us a perfect ending. Humanly speaking, in any case.

Because at some point, all of us will have to die too. And to be honest – that thought is quite scary. If it were up to us, we'd probably choose to stay alive and be happy forever.

But that's if we look at it from a human perspective! With the little knowledge we have about life – death is not a happy ending.

But Jesus came to change that completely. Because of Easter, death is not an ending at all. It's the beginning of a different part of our lives. The part where we will be with God. Forever. I don't think you get closer to perfect than that!

So with the open ending to his Gospel, Mark teaches us that life might not be perfect, and we might experience different things from those we were expecting, but that that's okay.

Because while we are on earth, we won't have to go through anything alone. God will be with us, because he loves us. The resurrected Jesus confirms that.

Through Jesus, God came close to us to take the sting out of all the imperfect things we experience in life.

On Good Friday the nails were hammered in His hands. On Easter Sunday, these nails were pulled out of all our hands, so to speak:

- So although we still sometimes cry, we can now cry with hope.
- Although we might sometimes feel alone, we can know that in reality we're not alone, because God is always there.
- Although we still sometimes get hurt, God puts a dressing on our wounds every time.
- Although we don't always understand everything that happens to us, we can now accept that we don't have to.
- Although our bodies get broken, we can know that the end of our bodies is not the end of our lives.
- Although we still have to die – that is not the end, but the beginning.

Mark's Gospel might not have the perfect ending. And life here on earth might not be anywhere close to perfect.

But Jesus is alive! And that is pretty amazing!!

May the celebration of Easter remind you that you don't have to long for a perfect ending – because if you believe in Jesus, there actually is *no* ending at all!

Hallelujah!

Amen