

“The Story That Cannot Be Spoiled”  
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St. Luke’s Episcopal Church – Anchorage, Kentucky  
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Mark 16:1-8

Has anyone here had someone, perhaps a family member or a friend, completely spoil a movie or a book for you? Just raise your hands. Don’t be afraid. Yeah, I can see the disappointment in your eyes. I don’t think people ruin it on purpose. They just get so excited, and they keep talking about it, or writing about it on Facebook or whatever.

Eventually, a major plot twist or how the story ends winds up tumbling out. Maybe you go ahead and read it or watch it anyway, and you enjoy it, but it’s not the same. Had you not known what you now know, the story would have been much more compelling.

But then there are movies and books and plays and pieces of music that you can watch and read and hear again and again, even if somebody spoiled it for you the first time around. For me, it’s Apollo 13. I love that movie, despite the fact that my high school history teacher ruined it for me. Ship blows up. Everybody survives. Total spoiler! If you haven’t seen that movie and don’t know U.S. history well, I apologize.

In a way, Easter’s a little bit spoiled. We already know the story. People who don’t even believe in God know the story. The crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus is the bedrock of our faith. So it can be a hard to feel suspense or surprise. He dies. He rises. Boom! End of story. Or is it?

Take Mary and Mary and Salome. I don’t know about you, but I find their behavior bizarre. Jesus repeatedly predicted his death and resurrection, and they were close supporters of his ministry, so that would not have been a secret to them. Yet they got up before dawn and

bought expensive spices so that they could complete his burial properly. You wouldn't do that if you didn't expect to see a dead body.

Had they not been listening to Jesus, or did they misunderstand, or simply not believe him? Hard to say, but they were surprised when they saw the tomb open and empty, the stone rolled away and an angelic messenger sitting there stating the obvious, "He is not here." You think?

But there's more. The angel tells them that Jesus will meet them in Galilee, "just as he told you," and they need to get word to the disciples, especially Peter. According to the story, that doesn't happen. "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." Can't blame them, but it's odd, because somebody obviously talked. The only other explanation is that somebody else came to the empty tomb after they left, listened to angel, stayed calm, and did something about it.

But that's not Mark's story. They came. They saw. They heard. They freaked out, ran away, and kept their mouths shut. That's Mark's story, and he's sticking to it, despite later attempts to spruce him up with a few resurrection appearances. Those later additions, verses 9 - 20, should be in double-brackets in your Bible back home, and if they're not, you need a better Bible. When you see something in double-brackets in a Bible, it means that really smart translators who actually dream in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek are very, very suspicious that it's not part of the original, but they're not 100% sure, so they leave it to the reader to decide.

This reader thinks that Mark stops right where Rev. Shelley left it, at verse 8, because Mark is a spoiler and a master of suspense who loves a cliffhanger. That's ingenious, being both a spoiler and a master of suspense. Now accusing somebody of being a spoiler, you've got to

back that up, so let's rewind to Chapter 1, verse 1, Gospel of Mark: "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, **the Son of God.**" What a jerk. He rips the mask off Jesus' secret identity 11 words into the story. 11 words! And Jesus' identity was a secret.

All throughout the Gospel, Jesus performs miracles and teaches with parables like nobody's taught before. All sorts of weird and wonderful stuff happens, and the disciples have a front row seat and still don't get it. This is where we see Mark's mastery of suspense. Will they ever figure it out? What does Jesus have to do to get through to them? At the end of the story, Mark leaves those questions unanswered. The disciples are nowhere. And this is where the cliffhanger comes in.

The women run away and stay silent, so what happens next? How does it end? It doesn't, because the story of Jesus hasn't ended yet, unless we choose to end it by running away and staying silent, too. Mark stops where he stops and seizes the reader by the throat and says, "The tomb's empty. Jesus has told you where to find him. What are **you** going to do about it?" I told you who he is in the very first verse. You have no excuse for confusion.

The story of Jesus will not stop until his last disciple falls silent, because the story lives inside us, and will live inside generations to come *if we tell it* to them, and a story with no end cannot be spoiled. It never gets old. It's always fresh, full of suspense and surprises, because this story is alive with the power of resurrection, surging through you and me and countless millions, but that energy has to go somewhere or it's nowhere.

This brings us to Galilee, where Jesus is waiting. And that might be the most astonishing part of the whole thing. One of his followers betrayed him. The other eleven abandoned him. One of those, Peter, denied him. Those guys were absent from the cross and didn't go to the tomb. I think most of us would try to replace them with somebody better, but Jesus never

abandoned them. He called them to Galilee, the place where their adventure together started, so that another never-ending adventure could begin anew. He forgave them, and he forgives us.

Jesus forgives us when we're bored and just going through the motions of being his followers. He forgives us when we wander off or get scared and hide. He forgives us when we don't get it. But his forgiveness is embedded in his call. The angel's message wasn't, "He's gone, arisen, and he told me to tell you not to worry about not coming through for him." No, the angel gave them directions for how to find Jesus, directions meant to be followed, and what Mark wants to know – what Jesus wants to know – from each and every one of us is this. Are you going to Galilee or not? Will you seek out Jesus to be reunited with him?

If we don't, Easter will be perpetually spoiled, just a big churchy party we throw every year, and there's nothing wrong with that, but nothing really exciting about it either. It's a lot of fun, but if that's all there is to it, we're leaving a lot on the table, because if we do go to Galilee, if somehow grace kindles a joy that propels us there, Easter will always be special, because the story we know is a person who lives, fiercely and forever, unpredictable and surprising.

I think we all want a piece of that. Reach out and accept it. Jesus is reaching out to you, and he won't stop. Go to Galilee. He'll find you before you find him. The story that won't end cannot be spoiled, and for as long as we follow Jesus, the story never stops. Amen.