

If you were to open your Bible and thumb to the end of Mark's gospel, you'd find that there are three endings. In most reputable translations Mark's Gospel ends at 16:8. However, after verse 8, there are two headings - *The Shorter Ending of Mark* & *The Longer Ending of Mark*.

In academic circles, it's a foregone conclusion that these endings are not original. They were later editions - appendices if you will. We know this because they detail practices and theologies from the 2nd and 4th centuries. These things include speaking in tongues, snake handling, and even drinking poison. *Yeah*, you heard me right. These were church practices that cropped up four or five decades after Mark was written. Thankfully, they've all but disappeared. Then there's that odd stuff about Jesus appearing *in different forms* - like a ghost. That's a Gnostic heresy called *Docetism* - and, you guessed it, that arose after the 2nd century.

There might be alternative endings - but only *one* original. Plain and simple.

Did you know that there are different endings to Mark's gospel?

Believe it or not John's Gospel suffers from a similar issue.

The ending of John's Gospel is, well...

...it's odd.

To the trained eye, and especially in Greek - it is obvious that someone different penned this chapter. Much like the way we all have different styles of speaking and writing, so too did the evangelists and that comes through in today's lesson.

The syntax and vocabulary of this section pose a problem. But what's more perplexing are the different scenarios we encounter.

Let's begin with the big haul of fish. It sounds suspiciously like another story in Luke's gospel. You know, all that stuff about tossing out your net and *fishing for people*? There is a chance that this passage was duplicated - but the motive is unclear. None of this is to say that there couldn't have been more than one instance where the disciples caught a huge load of fish, but ... it's odd.

Here's another detail.

This passage tells us that this is the third time the disciples have seen Jesus. What's up with them not knowing who He is? And what's more, why are some of the disciples embarrassed? Why would some know who Jesus is and not others? It's strange.

Speaking of strange.

Look at the sequence of events on the beach. It's where Jesus tells the disciples to go fish. They return with their haul and Jesus has a meal prepared. Fish no less. Why not cook the fish the disciples caught? Where did the fish come from? It's almost as if Jesus sent them on a pointless errand. What's frustrating is that this detail is never resolved in the text. That's a question for God.

Okay, one last thing because it's humorous.

The whole bit about Peter jumping out of the boat is pure gold. For some reason he's naked in the boat. He sees Jesus - decided to put clothes on and hops into the water. I don't know I suppose he was excited. Oh well - another question for God.

So, what are we to do with all that? If what I'm saying is true, if these things are later additions to the Gospel, what are their value, if any?

From the start I cannot overstate the fact that John's Gospel is a treasure of the church as a document of faith. Beyond this it is the author's profoundest hope that he has written a book meant to bring about belief in Jesus Christ. *Everything* written in this book from the first word to the last is meant to illicit faith in Jesus Christ. And it's from that lens that I make my observations.

From my point of view this chapter offers us both encouragement and a stark warning.

Let's start with the warning.

Did you notice what the disciples were up to?

It is mysterious, in fact baffling that the disciples are back at their old trade. There's no indication of how the crucifixion changed their lives. Why are they back in Galilee? It's almost as if the crucifixion occurred, Jesus rose from the dead, and they went back to life as usual.

What?! *Nothing* changed?! Wasn't that the whole point? God was bringing about something *new*.

Their actions also ignore the Great Commission. Jesus tells them to go to all lands and places and to baptize people in the name of the father the son and the Holy Spirit. Where does fishing fit into that? How does going back to your normal life further that mission? Well, the easy answer: it *doesn't*.

A few weeks ago, we experienced the awe and wonder of Easter morning. A mountaintop experience. And as we are living in this post-Easter time, we must ask ourselves a question: How has Easter changed our lives?

Is Easter morning simply a time where we get all gussied up, go out to brunch, search for eggs and go about our lives? Or is there something deeper happening within us?

...in the world?

This section of John warns us against acting like the disciples. Or at the very least, this characterization of the disciples.

Faith in Jesus Christ is such that it causes us to change.

It's sort of like the message that Julia put out on our road sign.

We don't change the message; the message changes us.

Encountering *Jesus* changes us.

If we go about our lives as if we have not encountered Jesus, then the Good News of Easter hasn't taken hold in our hearts. If that's the case than we're like the disciples - life as usual.

So, if Easter changes us, how we meant to act?

If you recall, at Evelyn's baptism my father preached. He gave a loving jab at me mentioning that I rarely preach on the Psalms. He's not wrong. Well - *ahem, *Dad* - let me correct course.

Today Psalm 30 offers us an enormous amount of encouragement.

For background - Psalm 30 was likely written by an individual who experienced conflict, called upon God, and received healing.

What's most notable about this Psalm are the ways in which the author gives thanks and praise to God.

We live in a post-Easter world. We are often left wondering how we are meant to act in the world. Often times we can feel like our actions aren't enough. There are too many hungry people. There are too many poor people, too many homeless folks. We can get caught up in this false narrative that everything we do amounts to a tiny drop in the bucket.

In the ninth verse the author speaks against this narrative.

Read along if you like:

What profit is there in my blood if I go down to the pit? Will the dust praise or declare your faithfulness?

Our role as believers is to proclaim God's love.

If we don't do it who's going to do it? The dust?

It's a tad hyperbolic but the point is clear.

One could go so far as to say that we do harm to the Gospel if we are not proclaiming God's love. The last thing the world needs are fewer voices singing God's praises. Our world so desperately needs to hear words of peace and love.

All people are meant to exude love.

God's people are *made* for love, and

As Lutherans we proclaim God's free gift of love.

Seems easy enough, but the way in which the author of Psalm 30 suggests we do that might strike us as odd.

In the Lutheran Church we are often glued to our pews - or seats as the situation has it. We have our routines, we like our liturgy, we like to know what's coming next. None of those things are bad. But do you know how God's people celebrate in the Bible?

They celebrate with dance!

When the Israelites escaped Egypt, Miriam and her friends took out their tambourines and got everyone dancing. When Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians, the young men packed up their instruments and because of the sadness called off the dances. When the exiles return to Jerusalem there will be singing and dancing. And the book of Psalms concludes with a call to strike up the band and *dance*.

Psalm 30 is about the Lord turning morning into dancing.

And you know what? *That's exactly what Easter morning does. It turns mourning into dancing.*

Remember how the old gospel song goes? I've got the joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart. In some ways this song's got it right. *But* the type of joy Psalm 30 speaks to isn't one that's

felt in our hearts alone. Instead, it is a joy felt with our feet, our legs, our whole body, our whole being.

Dancing, and giving praise to God is something that wholly encompasses who we are as Christians.

Okay, let's head back to the beach. Let's conclude with John.

I've made no qualms about the challenges this passage contains, yet even while I take issue with the sequence of events and it's dating there's one interaction that gives a bevy of hope.

It's the instance where Jesus has the fish prepared on the beach.

This text reminds me of the whole Jesus preparing a room for us thing. You know, there are many rooms in my father's mansion...

As followers of Christ, we are meant to go out into the world and to be fishers of people. Sometimes that effort yields and abundance and other times a giant goose-egg.

Yet whether we come back with a full net or an empty one, Jesus still meets us on the shore. Jesus meets us with abundance, sustenance, and love.

You see, ministry isn't necessarily about a product, it's about acting in faith.

That's ministry. Acting in faith.

Ministry is about leaving this place with God's command. We leave not knowing where we're going or what God is calling us to, but we leave in faith, coming back time and time again knowing that God will provide.

So, there you go. Take this text literally. Take it figuratively. Or look at it in a critical sense. Every angle provides theological depth and personal insight. You know why? Because Holy Scripture is a living and breathing thing - it speaks to us in many and various ways. But regardless of how you interpret this - there is a constant.

God calls on us - God's capable and faithful people, to proclaim the ways in which the Gospel *has* changed and *continues* to change our lives.

So, this week, friends think about the ways in which the gospel has changed your life. Think about the ways in which your actions express that gift. And in your own way go through this week loving others, praising God, and maybe - mix in just a little dancing.

Amen.