

Thomas Edison once said, "Show me a thoroughly satisfied man - and I will show you a failure." There's a lot of truth to that statement. Perfect satisfaction seldom takes you anywhere.

And if we're honest with ourselves I think we come up less than "thoroughly satisfied" with our gospel reading for today. The gospel writer Mark has described Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Salome coming to the tomb with spices to anoint Jesus' body. They wonder who will roll away the large stone that was placed across the front of the tomb. When they get there they find the stone rolled back, Jesus is not in the tomb, but a young man, dressed in a white robe, is sitting there. He tells them Jesus was raised and has gone ahead to Galilee. He then tells them to tell Jesus' disciples to meet him there. -So far so good.- But do they do that? Nope - they run away in fear and amazement and say nothing to anyone. End of the gospel reading for today.

If you know Mark's gospel well you also know that this is not just the end of the gospel reading for today. It is probably where Mark stopped writing too; end of the entire

gospel: an empty tomb, women fleeing and not saying anything to anyone. Talk about a letdown! Where's Jesus? Where's proof of the resurrection? Where's the message that they went and spread the good news of the resurrection throughout the world?

Yes, Mark's gospel ends with a letdown. It leaves us unsatisfied. Other early Christians weren't satisfied with this either, and so they added endings onto Mark's gospel to finish the story on a better note. Your Bibles probably have little footnotes saying that after Mark 16:8 several different endings have been tacked on, and then they include usually three different ones.

But that's where Mark leaves off. That's it. Women fleeing, not saying anything, the end. You may remember me preaching other times that this is really part of a larger literary strategy that Mark uses. He knew there were resurrection appearances of Jesus. He just didn't include them. Why? Well, you may also remember from my other sermons about Mark that not only does the story end with this let down, it also ends with an incomplete sentence, and even worse, he the last word of the incomplete sentence is, "because." A literal translation of the last sentence of Mark from Greek to English

would be, "And nothing to no one did they say, they were afraid because."

No one, no matter how bad their grammatical skills, ends a story like that.

Literary study shows that Mark leaves this sentence incomplete because it becomes complete when added to the first sentence of the gospel in chapter 1 verse 1. Therefore the story is circular. There are lots of other textual clues that support the circular nature of the gospel. I've preached about them other times, but I'm not going to take the sermon there today. Instead, I want to look at something else Mark is doing, for he is too brilliant an author to mean only one thing with this abrupt ending.

Mark leaves us unsatisfied with the Easter story for a very deliberate reason. He knows that if he gives us all that we want out of the resurrection of Jesus we will fail. When the resurrection story is just a nice complete thing we run through every Easter it stays just that - a nice thing we run through every Easter.

One thing that often amazes me about Easter Sunday here is that this 10:30 service usually goes way over an hour in length.

Yet, people rarely complain about that - although some do. The comment I get the most is, "I didn't want the service to end. I wanted it to keep going and going."

Now I'm not going to push my luck and try for a two-and-a-half hour service some year, but the point is, Easter Sunday morning is fun. It is especially celebratory. We put lots of extra effort into things and it usually pays off.

Easter in general is very joyful, and it should be! Death has lost. Life through the invincible power of God wins. If I could make a wish right now it would be that every one of you who is watching me right now, and even those of you engaged in more productive daydreaming, could feel the resurrection joy so fully in your lives that that you could rise above every pain and complication and problem that ever comes your way in life. Wouldn't that be great!?

But that's not real. If Mark's gospel is anything, it is real. It is more true and more real than we like to admit in fact. Reality is that often the joy of Easter Sunday morning is little more than a few hours of escape from the rest of the world. When it is over reality sinks in again.

If your arthritis hurt this morning it will still hurt this afternoon. If your child is having trouble in school, or in life, those problems won't go away. Broken relationships are still broken relationships. If you were unemployed before you woke up this morning you're probably still unemployed when this service is over.

Mark knows that telling about the appearances of Jesus after the resurrection doesn't take problems away.

Mark does another very interesting thing with his grammar in our gospel reading; although it is subtle. Our English translations get it so wrong that they completely reverse what Mark intended. Mark quotes the young man in the tomb as saying, "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, [and here is the mistake. Our text reads] who was crucified. He has been raised." It should read, "...[Jesus] who has been crucified. He was raised."

Okay, that probably didn't sound any different. For those of you grammaticians, you may have noticed translation swaps the simple past and the perfect tenses. For the rest of us, the difference is this: In the way it is translated it sounds like the cross was a once and done thing and now Jesus' new and

ongoing reality is the resurrected one. That is technically true, but not what Mark wrote.

What Mark wants to bring across is this. Jesus *has been* crucified. He was, he is, and he will forever be primarily the crucified one. That is Jesus' ongoing reality. As for the resurrection, yes, that was a great event in history. It proves God's power. But it is not Jesus' primary identity. Said differently, the resurrection does not erase the cross. The cross stays strong.

You may remember me mentioning this before. What do we have in the front of our church? Do we have an empty tomb? No. We have a cross. Even as we joyfully celebrate the resurrection today, crucifixion still stays in its reigning position.

Mark's way of ending the gospel by leaving the crucifixion stand supreme is a true statement for many people's lives. Your problems didn't go away because of today. The world isn't fixed. Problems are still there, and they're still just as strong.

But that doesn't mean that the resurrection was nothing or was worthless. I said a couple minutes ago that I wish that

resurrection joy could triumphantly carry you through everything. Ultimately that is true - but not to make you immune to the problems. It is to engage you. Let me conclude with the Easter message from the Presiding Bishop of the ELCA, the Rev. Mark Hanson.

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,
Christ is risen! Imagine the power in those words of promise.

When the disciples first heard Jesus speak of his death and resurrection, "they kept the matter to themselves" (Mark 9:10). But the news is too good to keep to ourselves. The life of Jesus Christ has been unleashed into the world.

Because Christ is risen, you can embrace life's complexities and uncertainties with a living, daring confidence in God's grace. The risen Christ goes ahead of you, meeting you in the most surprising faces and unexpected places. Christ's resurrection puts us right where God wants us to be -- in the thick of life.

Because Christ is risen, you have a word of hope. To those weary from mourning loss and fearing death, the assurance is given that nothing in all creation will separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

The life of Jesus, God's own life, has burst into the world, restoring community. At the barriers we erect to divide us, the risen Christ meets us, turning those walls into tables of reconciliation. To those who live in fear and feel unworthy, the promise is given. "You are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God" (Ephesians 2:19).

Every morning you awaken with the mark of Jesus' death on your forehead and the promise of Christ's resurrection on your lips.

Christ is risen! Alleluia!

In God's grace, Mark Hanson

Amen