

Mark 16:1-8
April 4, 2021

Hope Mennonite Church
Easter Sunday, Year B

The Ending that Isn't an Ending (The Defiant Comma)

In 1993, a follower of Jesus named Nikola climbed into a rickety and over-packed truck. He left behind his native Croatia and drove across the border into the active war zone of Bosnia. He was carrying relief supplies for desperate people. Miraculously, he made it there and back alive ... **and** he did so several more times. And with each mission, Nikola's **compassion** for the suffering people of Bosnia only increased ... increased so much that he **moved** to Bosnia to direct the **distribution** of supplies.

According to nationality, ethnicity, religion and **the battle lines**, he was the **enemy** of the people he had come to love. Yet Nikola's **compassion** could **not** be confined.

And then something even more dramatic happened. Back in Croatia, Nikola proposed to his girlfriend Sandra. He said to her, "Come with me **to Bosnia**. We can get married **there** and join the relief work together." And to that crazy proposal, Sandra said, "Yes!"

And so, the two young foreigners joined hands as they stood on a roofless concrete pad, surrounded by piles of rubble and shelled buildings. They pledged their lives to each other in a shattered, charred, blasted, smoldering city, while a line of refugees plodded down the adjacent street and bombs exploded in the distance. [Summarized from N. G. Shenk, *Hope Indeed!*, 63-65].

The CEO of a Fortune 500 company caught **everyone** by surprise. One day this very successful and wealthy businessman handed his resignation to a **shocked** Chair of the Board. One month later, he moved to the stifling hot Mekong jungle of Vietnam. There he organizes reading programs for school children. He says, "**This** is what I'm called to do."

September 11, 2001. Terrorists fly jets into the twin towers of the World Trade Center. A flight to Boston is diverted to Newfoundland. The townspeople meet the passengers at the airport and take the **stranded strangers** into their homes.

A 40-year-old woman sits at the kitchen table sipping coffee. The morning before, she buried her 11-year-old son. He had a congenital heart defect. With the coffee cup in one hand, she reads a note from her husband in the other. The note says, “I can’t take this anymore. I have to get away.”

From the dining room, the woman hears a familiar sound ... a motorized wheelchair. In it is her sixteen-year-old son, paralyzed from birth. The chair is moving forward and backward ... **restless**.

Suddenly, the woman stands up. She grabs her coat. She says, “Charles, I’m going out for a while.” He doesn’t answer. But the wheelchair **stops**. All she can hear is his oxygen tank: []. She closes the door behind her. []

The woman returns with a small paper bag. Charles has not moved. She puts the bag in the kitchen. Then she fills a bowl with water and sets it on the dining room table. Next, she takes a family photo album from the drawer. She sits down and begins leafing through it. Her tears fall silently on the pages. After a few minutes, she wipes her tears and closes the album ... **carefully** and **solemnly**. She lets out a sigh and opens the brown paper bag. She takes out a handful of **pellets** ... and turns to go back to the dining room and the bowl of water.

When she turns around her way is **blocked**. Charles is in the doorway. He is agitated and shaking. He says, “[] Stop mother! [] Please stop! I know what you’re doing. [] But I want to live. [] Do you hear me? I want to live!” (Adapted from Viktor Frankl, ***Man’s Search for Meaning***). [].

The message of **Easter** is a simple one: Life and death are **the inescapable realities** of our existence. **But** ... life and death are **not** equal. **Life** is **stronger** than **death**. That is God’s will and God’s gift and God’s power. And God’s **quintessential act** of **life is stronger than death** is the **resurrection** of Jesus Christ.

Our Scripture reading today is a **witness** to the **resurrection**. And the best we can tell, this **witness** ends at **Mark 16:8**, which reads, *The women fled from the tomb, for fear and amazement* [literally, “trauma and ecstasy”] *had seized them* [what’s it like to feel **trauma and ecstasy** at the

same time?] *and they said nothing to anyone for they were afraid.* **The end!** [] Do you find that ending **satisfying?** **Convincing?** Does it feel like that's **all** Easter should tell us? Or, does it feel **incomplete?** [] Over the centuries, most people have felt like Mark leaves us **hanging**. If Mark was a movie, it's like the last scene is interrupted by a fire alarm. Everybody has to leave the building ... and can't go back in. The last scene remains **unfinished**. You're left **hanging**. You're left with **questions**: Did the butler do it? Do they live happily ever after? **Mark 16:8** is like that. It's an **ending** that **isn't** an **ending**. There's simply **got** to be **more**. []

Well, there's a **path** through this difficulty. There's a **path** to the **more**. And the **hint** comes from the ethereal heavenly figure inside the tomb. He speaks to the women. He gives them a **message** for Jesus' disciples. And the message is **not**, "We found the tomb empty." The message is **not**, "Come and see for yourselves." The message is, "**Remember** ... what **Jesus told you** about **Galilee**." What does that mean?

The heavenly figure says the key to understanding **Easter** is **Galilee!** Really? Well, Jesus **did** say something about **Galilee** ... right after the Last Supper ... right before his arrest. It was on the Mount of Olives. He gave a **preview** ... a **preview** of **after** Easter. Jesus said, "**After I am raised up**, I will go ahead of you to **Galilee**" (**Mark 14:28**). So, **before** Easter, Jesus says there's something **after** Easter ... **I'll** be there ... **and** ... **you'll** be there. It must have sounded strange ... cryptic ... maybe crazy ... maybe wonderous ... and definitely **open-ended**. The heavenly figure in the tomb says, "You need to remember **this**, because there **really is** ... **more!** **Jesus** said so!"

Jesus said **Easter** is a story **to be continued** ... **Easter** is followed by ... **a comma** ... The camera keeps rolling ... and the disciples are **in** the frame. **Life is stronger than death** and God's will and gift and power **continue** ... **after Easter** ... and **continue** ... **in us!**

Easter **is** a story **to be continued**. And we are co-stars in the sequel, as we **meet** Jesus ... **in Galilee**.

Well, what is Galilee? Galilee was Jesus' home ... where he grew up ... where everybody knows your name ... where he first ministered ... where everything began. Remember the beginning of Mark: *Jesus came into Galilee ... proclaiming the Good News of God and saying, 'The time is fulfilled. The reign of God is at hand. Turn your lives around and put your trust in God's Good News (Mark 1:14).* Jesus says that after Easter, he's going back there, back to the starting place, to join us ... and continue inviting people to transformation and trust. Back to Galilee! That's where we, his followers, will see him ... by joining the risen Christ in active ministry. Easter is circular. Easter takes ***life is stronger than death*** right back into the middle of fishing and farming and politics and health issues and difficult neighbors and taxes. Easter continues ... in real, everyday life! That's what Jesus says and that's what he wants his disciples to remember.

And friends, the same is true for us. Easter reverberates for us in Galilee ... in our everyday lives, our community, where our people are. That's where we meet the living Christ ... and meet him in all kinds of ways.

Katie Davis ... 22 years-old, single, middle-class American, with a passion for Jesus. She moves to Uganda to work at an orphanage. After several years she decides to adopt children herself. So now this single young adult is mother to 13 Ugandan children. ***Easter continues. Life is stronger than death. And God keeps showing us every day.***

Harold is a chemist in Ontario. He has a little lab on his farm. He isolates a compound that helps premature babies breathe better. He gets some donors ... rents a garage ... hires a small staff and sets up production. It's cramped and basic and clean. Now he produces this drug for developing countries at very low cost. ***Life is stronger than death. Easter ... is a comma.***

There's a grandmother raising three grandchildren by herself. The parents are in the Army. She says, "I'm too old for this." But ... she has a neighbor. The neighbor stops in to see the grandmother a few times a week. The neighbor just let's her talk ... let's her know she's not alone.

And it's nothing less than a **lifeline** for the grandmother. ***Easter continues. Life is stronger than death. And God keeps showing us every day.***

There's a woman in a big-city hospital. She's awaiting surgery. It's **unexpected** surgery. And it's **high risk**. The **people** and the **decisions** are all moving quickly. The family members pace with anxiety.

Suddenly the door opens. The surgeon enters. None of them has ever seen this man before. He explains the procedure. And then ***the surgeon*** asks, "May I **pray** with you." The woman and her family are shocked. They say, "Yes, please!" So, the surgeon gathers everyone together ... the family ... the anesthesiologist ... the nurses ... the dietary aid ... several housekeeping staff. Twenty people, most of them complete strangers to each other, surround the woman in her hospital bed. They have **not rehearsed** this. They bow their heads and put their arms around each other. And the surgeon prays. And everyone can feel the anxiety ease. Peace settles on their minds. There's no doubt: The Spirit of God is present. ***Jesus is keeping his promise: He is meeting us in Galilee, just as he said.***

Dear friends, life **is** stronger than death. Easter is a **comma** ... it **continues** all around us. God is **showing** us and **sharing** it with us. Jesus is fulfilling what he said: Because **I** live, **you** will live also (**John 14:19**)!

Friends, Christ is risen! []. The Lord bless you all.

Elements of Worship

Opening Scripture Reading Easter Sunday 4/5/15

Pilate the Roman governor learned from the centurion that Jesus was already dead. Then he granted the body to Joseph of Arimathea. Joseph was a respected member of the Jewish high council and he was waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God.

Joseph bought a linen cloth. Then he took Jesus' body down from the cross and wrapped it in the cloth. He laid the body in a tomb that had been hewn out of the rock. Joseph then rolled a stone against the door of the tomb.

Two women, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses, saw where Jesus' body was laid.

(Adapted from Mark 15:43, 45-47)

Scripture Reading Mark 16:1-8

¹When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go and anoint the body of Jesus.

²Then, very early in the morning on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb, after the sun had come up. ³The women had been saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?” ⁴When they looked up, they saw that the stone had already been rolled away. It was very large.

⁵Then they entered the tomb and saw a young man dressed in a white robe, seated on the right side. The women were alarmed. ⁶But he said to them, “Don’t be alarmed! You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified. He has been raised. He is not here. Look—there is the place where they laid him. ⁷But go tell his disciples and Peter: ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee.’ There you will see him, just as he told you.”

⁸So, the women went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them. And they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.