

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Each of the four gospels has a different ending.

Matthew's gospel ends with the women going to the tomb early that first Easter morning to anoint the dead body of Jesus only to be greeted by an earthquake, which succeeded in rolling the stone away from the entrance to the tomb, and an angel, who told them that Jesus had been raised and that they should go to Galilee where Jesus would meet them.

They go and on the way, Jesus meets them and they grab hold of him and worship him. Matthew also tells of the guards who shared the story of the empty tomb with the temple authorities and how, together they decided to tell the Pilate that someone must have come and stole the body, so that he wouldn't go ballistic. Matthew also tells us that some bribe was involved in this collusion. The disciples then meet in Galilee, on the mountain, where Jesus meets them again and the gospel ends with the familiar words from Christ, And Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

Luke's gospel ends with the women going to the tomb, only to be greeted by two men who tell them of Jesus' resurrection. They in turn go back to the disciples to tell them the story and Luke records, "But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them."

Luke goes on then to tell of the post resurrection appearances of Jesus: on the road to Emmaus, and afterwards, when he sat down with them to eat and then opened the Scriptures to them and blessed them, saying, "You are witnesses to these things and behold I send the promise of my Father upon you. The gospel ends with the disciples returning home with Jesus, and very eyes.

John's gospel has Mary Magdalene returning to the tomb alone, and when she sees that the stone was rolled away, she runs and finds Peter and the other disciples, who then run to the tomb to see for themselves. Excited to go back home and tell the story to everyone, the disciples leave, but Mary remains, crying. As she does, Jesus comes to her, only, at first, she mistakes him for the cemetery caretaker, until he speaks her name, Mary. John also includes the story about doubting Thomas as well as two other post resurrection accounts, one on the shore of the lake where he prepared breakfast for them and the account wherein Jesus asks Peter three times, "do you love me?" An exchange almost universally regarded as Jesus forgiving Peter for his three denials. The gospel ends with these words..."But there are also many other things which Jesus did; were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.

This year, the second year of the three year lectionary cycle, known as year B, has the Easter reading from Mark's gospel. It ends with these words:

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

Over the centuries, later editions of Mark's gospel have an additional sentence or paragraph or two, but most scholars agree that these additions were merely later attempts to bring Mark's gospel into accord with the other three. Ancient manuscripts have the gospel ending where we heard it end today.

I'm inclined to believe that that WAS the original ending, because it makes sense. The story of the good news of Jesus Christ, ends with the empty tomb. In many ways, you don't need anything else. Sure, it's nice that we have stories of Thomas, being able to put his hands into Jesus wounds, yes it's kind of quaint that Jesus hosted the first coffee hour on the beach for the emerging church that was the apostolic band, which makes Lutherans closest to God because next to God's Word we hold the offering of food next in line to true godliness. But the true power behind the story is the Risen Christ, not the reappearing one. While I respect my brothers and sisters from other faith traditions, I really don't need to have Christ reappear again, whether it's in a locked room the following afternoon, the lakeshore the following morning, or in Upstate New York 1800 years later.

For the real power of Easter lies in that empty tomb which represents the reality of the promise that Jesus revealed to us when he said, "let not your hearts be troubled, believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also."

The life begun in God, ends in God. The power of the resurrection and of this day, lies not in how well we present the case for the missing body of Christ, but how well the body of Christ has found what's missing in us and restored it to life again, and...and... how willing we are to do that for others.

The other telling part of this gospel account lies in the fact that the women left the tomb and said nothing to anyone. Well....sooner or later, they must have said something to someone, else you and I wouldn't be here this morning. But their initial inaction begs the question, "After hearing the witness of the resurrection this morning, what will we do?" What will you do? After having heard the story, having peered into the empty tomb yourself, having been told that God keeps God's promises, what kind of a witness will you be? Will you share the good news of Christ, somehow? Will you witness in any way to the power of God made manifest in the victory of life over death, or will you simply pick up your lily, throw your bulletin in the recycle bin on your way out, and go home to a nice dinner of smoked ham and scalloped potatoes?

We are called to be witnesses to Jesus Christ and to the power of his resurrection. Imagine if this afternoon, soon after services are over, Irene Ayad, who lost her husband a month ago, or Ruth and Larry DeAeth who lost their daughter this past week, or Elaine Fuhlbruck who lost her 17 year old nephew, or Lyn Searles who lost her beloved Elwood two weeks ago, or June and David Hehr who lost husband and father last month, imagine if each of them received 5 or ten phone calls from those of us in church this morning telling them that while we were in church this morning we thought of Ibrahim and Pat, of Aaron and El and Cliff and how we found comfort in the promise that Easter brings, and told them that we hope they find renewed hope in that message and in our caring. Imagine if we did the same for Bud Yuhl's family, and Jim Jagow, and Elizabeth Turner, and Melissa Haller, and Charlotte Vogelsang, or anyone who has suffered the loss of one they loved this past year?

Karen Koehler still misses Bob, Joyce Hofmar still misses Don, I still miss my Dad, who's been gone 20 years and my Debby her mom gone 25 years now, you still miss your grandfather and God still makes the same promise,

- The horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea and the Lord shall reign forever and ever.
- Lo I am with you even to the end of the age
- You are witnesses to these things and behold I send the promise of my Father upon you.
- And were every word and action of God that brings hope and comfort recorded, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. For that we say thanks be to God. He is Risen. He is risen indeed.

Amen.