

I am sure some of you remember the closing theme song on the PBS show, *Lamb Chop's Play-Along*, hosted by puppeteer, Shari Lewis. It was called "*The Song That Never Ends*." Here are the words: "This is a song that never ends, it just goes on and on my friend...." At the end of each episode, the puppets and children would sing several continual verses as the song just keeps repeating and repeating in a loop, while Shari Lewis would try in vain to get them to stop singing. It really is one of those songs that just kept playing over and over inside your head. *The Song That Never Ends*. Well, today we come to celebrate **another song that never ends**...the song of joy and of hope, the song of the resurrected Lord. And, this is a song that keeps repeating in our very being, in our individual lives, and among the body of Christ for the rest of our lives.

The **beginning** of the end in Mark's gospel is very much like the other gospels. It is early on Sunday morning and the women are headed to the tomb while it is still dark. In their grief, they are carrying spices to embalm Jesus' body because they had not been able to do this when he was wrapped in linen and placed in the tomb. On that horrible Friday afternoon of Jesus' death, the Sabbath was about to begin, and even anointing a body was forbidden work on the Sabbath. So, the women

arrive at the tomb and they are astonished when they discover the massive stone that had blocked the entrance has already been rolled away. And, equally alarming to them, is the stranger they find in the tomb, a man dressed in white, who tells them, “Do not be afraid. Jesus, who was crucified, has been raised. He is not here. Go and tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee...just as he told you.” Well, if the trauma and horror of the past days had not been enough, this stranger now tells them to **not** be afraid and go back and tell the others Jesus **has** been **raised** and will meet them in Galilee! And, it is **here** where Mark’s gospel, which by the way was the first gospel to be written, is very **different** from the other gospels. Mark’s last words to us are, “So 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**.”

That’s it folks! That is all we get! That is all Mark gives us. In fact, the risen Jesus **never** actually makes an appearance in Mark’s gospel. We have a resurrection scene without Jesus that seemingly ends in failure. The women not only **fail miserably** as they leave in **terror**, they also say absolutely **nothing** to anyone! This is quite a cliffhanger to say the least!

Now, it is true that most of you will find in your Bibles a few additional verses to Mark’s gospel. However, those additional verses were added a

few hundred years later by monks who found Mark's ending so unsettling and unfinished they had to "*fix it.*" Yet, the stark reality and truth we face on this Easter morning is that Mark's gospel, the first gospel written, concludes by deliberately **not concluding!** Theologian, Tom Long, describes this unfinished-ness so well when he says the writer of Mark's gospel finishes the story of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, "by dangling something incomplete and unsatisfying before the reader in the final verse..... Not only does this verse fail to provide proper narrative closure, it also lurches to an awkward grammatical stop because a more literal translation of the Greek would actually read, 'To no one anything they said; afraid they were for...'
That's it, folks! It is almost as if the author of Mark had suddenly been dragged from his writing desk in midsentence."
Mark's gospel story ends very abruptly, unfinished, and the risen Jesus never appears.

So, why would Mark end his telling of the Jesus story in this manner? What gives? What is going on? Well, Mark was not only a good storyteller, he knew **exactly** what he was doing. If we look at the opening verse in Mark's gospel, Mark 1:1, we find these words, "The **beginning** of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." The **entire gospel** of Mark is only the **beginning** of the story. Mark uses a cliffhanger to invite **us into** the

story. Mark's gospel really ends unfinished because the gospel story is **always** beginning again, anew for every person, in every time and place. This open-ended gospel that threatens to end in failure places **us** where the women left off. **We** are invited into the story to go and tell the good news that this person, Jesus of Nazareth, has been raised and is going ahead of **us** to meet **us**, just as he promised. And, did you notice where Jesus is going? The man in white tells the women Jesus is going ahead of them to **Galilee!** That is where they will meet him. Galilee was **home**, the place where Jesus and the disciples were from, the place where they lived their **ordinary day to day lives**. This is significant because, as we hear this story, **we** are told Jesus will meet **us** in the **ordinary places of life**, those places where we spend our day to day lives.

Joan Mitchell, in her book *Beyond Fear and Silence*, suggests the three women who left that tomb in terror and silence in Mark's narrative, bring each of us, the readers and hearers, to our own thresholds of faith, to the limit of words to speak the **unspeakable**....and to the limit of human experience to trust Who or What is beyond death....the narrative **still** calls the disciples of each new generation to speak for themselves, and bring the gospel into dialogue **with our very lives**. (p. 115)

Yes, we are called to bring the gospel Good News into dialogue with our own lives. That dialogue happens in the depth of human pain and suffering as we discover the crucified, risen Christ is present to us. That dialogue happens when we find ourselves in the depths of failure, when we fail miserably and discover the crucified, risen Christ is present to us. That dialogue happens in the depth of the pain of this horrible pandemic, as we have discovered the crucified, risen Christ is present to us! In the depth of such pain and despair, in the messiness of our own lives, in those places and times when we just do not know what to do, when we have no words to describe the pain, and when we do not know how to go on, we meet the crucified, risen Christ and **we** discover **hope**. Today's gospel tells us that we meet **real hope** that is rooted in the love of a very real God who walks **with** us and **meets** us in the depth of **all** the messiness, all the mixed-up-ness, all the joys, all the sorrows and the real "**stuff**" of our everyday lives. And, the song of the crucified, risen Christ becomes **our** song because that unending pattern of dying and rising is **the** story of our lives.

We live in a world where we like closure and happy endings. When we read books and see movies, we **want** closure and happy endings. However, when we finish reading a book with a happy ending, we put it down and simply say, "Great story!" The gospel of Mark, with its unfinished

ending, is very different because you **cannot** put it down, even if you want to. The gospel good news **is the never-ending story, the never-ending song!** The crucified, risen Christ walks with us as the Jesus story continues to be written in our own lives, and as we joyfully sing out the victorious song that never ends! Today, we celebrate the hope we have been given as a community of Faith, hope rooted in the love of the risen, universal Christ who lives among us! We celebrate the hope of the never-ending story, the song that never ends, the song of the risen Christ who is **always, always, always** bringing life out of death. We celebrate the hope of the risen Christ who goes before us and is drawing us into a new future, making **us** ever new! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!