

03 April 2021

Writings: Surprise Ending

So 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 (Mark 16:8).

Imagine you go to a movie. As you watch the film, you connect with its main characters, its plot is logical and its message is thought provoking. You get to the climax of the movie and all the threads of the story start coming together. Yet, the ending doesn't wrap up the loose ends and makes no sense. After the film is over, you are left wondering what message was the movie trying to communicate?

In tonight's Gospel, the evangelist Mark has the women who are told to share the news of Christ's Resurrection with his disciples flee the tomb in fear and tell no one what has happened. This strange ending has baffled Bible scholars for centuries. It even prompted two authors to add appendixes to the Gospel to try to provide a more satisfactory ending.

One of the major themes in Mark's Gospel is the shortcomings of Christ's disciples. The first disciples get off to a promising by immediately leaving everything to follow Jesus (**Mark 1:18**). But, their weak faith quickly becomes apparent. When their boat gets swamped by a storm on the sea, the disciples panic and wake Jesus (**Mark 4:38-39**). After Christ tells them about his upcoming death at the hands of the Jewish religious leaders, Peter opposes this possibility and is rebuked by Jesus (**Mark 8:32-33**). On the way to Capernaum, the disciples argue about who is the greatest among them and are told by Jesus how they are to be like a little child (**Mark 9:34-37**). Female figures in the Gospel are presented more favorably with Peter's mother-in-law serving Jesus and his disciples after she is healed (**Mark 1:31**), the Syro-Phoenician woman showing persistent faith in asking Jesus to heal her daughter (**Mark 7:28-29**) and the women accompanying Jesus providing for him and witnessing his crucifixion (**Mark 15:40-41**). Yet, when these same women are given the most important mission in the Gospel (to share the news of Christ's resurrection) they do not do it. Why did Mark end his Gospel this way?

One possible answer is that Mark wanted to stress how the story of Christ's life is a mystery which can never be fully understood. Although Jesus was called the "Holy One of God" by a demon (**Mark 1:24**), "Messiah" by Peter (**Mark 8:29**), "Son of David" by Bartimaeus (**Mark 10:47**) and "God's Son" by the Roman Centurion (**Mark 15:39**) each of these titles only partially expressed his identity because its totality could not be grasped by limited human reason. While the purpose of Christ's mission (the redemption of humanity from sin) was only revealed through his death on the cross, it doesn't make sense according to human reason or experience. Perhaps, the unease with which we view this ending is a way for Mark to remind us of how our faith is constantly unfolding before us and we will never fully get it. After all, God is a mystery; beyond our comprehension. We only get glimpses of divine truth and we must learn to accept that and simply live with the mystery.

During this Covid 19 pandemic, we are learning to live with uncertainty and mystery. Before the virus, most people had confidence in the human ability to understand problems and solve them. Although it might take a while, medical experts would learn how the virus works and can be stopped. The right public policies will keep us all safe. In a crisis, people will do the right thing. All of these assumptions are now being challenged. Science is not the smooth and certain process many people once considered it. Like the rest of us scientists make mistakes (they are human after all). The data they rely on can change and so the conclusions they draw from it must be adjusted. Public policy involves making trade offs between different interests within society. While keeping people safe is important, so is keeping them employed. It is becoming obvious the interests of certain individuals and groups are more important than those of others. As this crisis continues, it is becoming apparent there are people who put their own interests first and if others suffer, it seems of no concern to them. Open defiance of public health regulations is becoming more common. The idea Canadians are a law abiding people is coming into question.

Message for Website
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Covid 19 is showing us life is a confusing movie. While its characters may show some good qualities, their shortcomings will become visible in time. Although we might want its plot to proceed in clear and reasonable ways, the story may have a few unexpected surprises for us. While we might want all the loose ends tied at the end so we can understand them, we might be disappointed. Like the ending of Mark's Gospel, life is a mystery we may never fully understand. But this doesn't mean we can continue along its journey.

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