

To Be Continued

Resurrection of Our Lord
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April 12, 2009
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

Acts 10:34-43; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11; Mark 16:1-8

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

Doesn't it just drive you nuts when you're watching a great TV show or drama, and something really significant to the story is about to happen, and there's a break for commercials? And have you noticed how many commercials TV networks can cram in before you get back to the real action? And the volume! Have you noticed how, when the commercials come on, the volume suddenly increases, making them much more important than the program? They're so loud you can hear them not only in the kitchen but even in the power room. And then, when the program is really gripping, and you're really interested and just can't wait, those three dreaded words come up on the screen: "to be continued." And you wonder when? And will you be able to see it?

It's almost as if the writer of Mark was writing for television. Let me let you in on the greatest untold secret: Without the Bible, Hollywood and TV would not have a script to write.

You see, it's almost as if Mark was a writer for TV. There are, of course, no commercial breaks in his gospel, but he's written in all the mini climaxes you need to have one. Look at the first scene. It opens with the women preparing the requisite burial spices and heading off for the tomb. The women and their companions have been with Jesus for some time, if not the whole time. They were Jesus' followers who provided for Him, who ministered to Him, served Him, fed Him, cared for Him. They observed the crucifixion from a distance, and watched where Joseph of Arimathea took the body, and saw exactly where he laid it in the tomb. Unlike the disciples, they don't abandon Him, they don't deny Him, they don't hand Him over to the authorities. These women are the most faithful of His followers. The tension begins to build on the journey to the tomb, when they realize they have a significant problem.

Good time for the first commercial break, don't you think?

The second scene opens with the women discussing their problem – they have forgotten something essential to the completion of their task. We know how that works don't we? Pretty much every Easter dinner, you know that particular dish you worked on really hard, that was going to be a sort of supporting, yet star piece of the meal. And the meal has been served and the table cleared and we're ready for dessert. You go out to get the dessert, and there on the bench, is that prize piece that you worked on and forgot to serve.

The women are in a similar position. They have made no arrangements to have the large stone which seals the tomb, rolled aside. Consequently, they doubt that it is possible for them to roll the stone away; they don't have the strength.

Have you noticed that about life? You get everything together to accomplish a routine task, only to find out that you have forgotten something without which there is no way the task before you can be accomplished. The women's problem is the stone sealing the tomb. And . . . you've got it – we break away for the second string of commercials.

You might think, in the next scene, that the women would want to hurry back to the disciples and enlist their manly help, but they don't. They continue on, and when they get to the tomb, find that the impossible has already occurred. Creepy, don't you think? It is here that we have the next commercial break.

Then the women enter the tomb. And on the shelf where Jesus' body ought to be, there is nothing. The women are alarmed. Even we know that tombs and graves just don't empty themselves. They look around to see where the body might be, and suddenly realize they're not alone. There in the tomb, is a young man. He appears to them as clothed in blazing white light. This is no ordinary young man, but their knowledge of the story helps them understand that this appearance indicates a messenger of God.

But he's a pretty daft messenger is you ask me. Listen to how he starts – You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth. Well of course! That was the tomb where he was buried. But He isn't here. Duh! He lives! What was that? He lives! And then the young man commissions the women to tell Peter and the disciples that Jesus has gone ahead of them and waits for them in Galilee, just as He said He would.

The women have had enough. They flee the scene in terror and say nothing to anyone. Why? Well, they have good reason, if you think about it, to be terrified: not just because the stone was rolled away, not just because there was a dazzling young messenger in the tomb, but because of the consequences that might be expected if Jesus turns up alive, and is encountered walking on His way to Galilee. After all, who in their right mind, really wants, or expects, to encounter a man once dead now up and walking about?

But the women's fear is much deeper than that, for the reaction of the government and the religious officials, who just put this man to death, will surely be swift and terrible. And just as the male disciples did before them, they abandon their master and avoid their commission. And then the three fatal words appear on the screen: "TO BE CONTINUED."

The gospel stops so abruptly and the ending we are anticipating (because we know the story so well) just isn't there. The gospel account ends as it does, precisely because the proclamation of the good news was – and still is – incomplete. The story has yet to unfold. Things are yet to be done. Jesus' appearance is in the disciples' future. And beloved, believe it or not, Jesus really is in our future, also.

You see, although the Gospel doesn't say it, the women will eventually tell Peter and the disciples. And in the future, Peter will be restored not only as a disciple, but as the rock upon which the church in all its many and varied expressions will be built. What is there for us, beloved, is not just an absence, an empty tomb, but a very real promise of presence yet to be fulfilled, and an invitation to walk and play a part in the ongoing unfolding story. The reality is

that each of us has a unique and individual part to play in the continuation of the story. You see, the empty tomb points to the real possibility of an encounter with the One once laid to rest in its darkened depths and is now freed from its grasp.

The risen Lord is not to be encountered in a tomb, but of all places, in a morsel of bread and in the tiniest sip of wine, and as unusual as it may seem, in the person of those whom we serve in their need, and as impossible as it is to fathom, awaiting each and every one of us in our future. Just as He waited for the disciples in Galilee, He waits for us, that we might finally meet Him personally, at the hour of our death. Just as the risen Lord waited for the disciples in their future, so too He waits for us in ours. Because you see, ultimately Easter is not about the faithfulness of the disciples, nor is it about our faithfulness; Easter is about the mercy and faithfulness of God, for whom the impossible is possible. For His resurrection means new life now and in the life yet to come.

The question is, beloved, do we have what it takes? Are we up for the journey? For now the future is open to us, with Jesus arisen and awaiting us, to encounter us where He has promised to be, for Christ is risen, He is risen indeed!

Amen.