

SERMON – 17 APRIL 2016

(Reading – Mark 16: 1-8)

I preached and reflected on our reading on Easter Sunday but, today, I would like to take a different look at our text – this time in the context of the entire Gospel of Mark.

In two of the original Greek manuscripts that survived, the Gospel of Mark ends with our reading here at verse 8. Is this a way to end a good story?

I mean really, who would end a story with the words: “Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.”

All of us like a good story which usually entails that it has a good and satisfying ending. No one likes “loose ends” after reading a good story. No one likes that sinking feeling in your stomach when a good story does not end like you thought it would. To us this is not a perfect ending at all.

So I think a lot of people would take Mark to task for his inability to provide us with a perfect ending. And when reading the whole Gospel in Greek, I can tell you that his ability to use the Greek language is not good at all. But hey, who am I to talk? To use and communicate in a second or third language is not easy at all. So in literary terms, apart from his imperfect ending, Mark would not have won any awards or would he?

Upon reflecting on this ending and on his whole Gospel, I tend to think that the Gospel of Mark contains a very strong message for us all. Maybe this is what Mark wanted to do from the start.

He just wanted to tell us about Jesus, why Jesus came to the world and what happened to Him after He was crucified. He did not want to elaborate on the facts of Jesus’ birth or the details of Jesus’ appearances. He was born and He was risen from death. This is what Mark wanted to emphasize. This is, after all, the core of the Gospel message. And it is interesting to note how Matthew and Luke filled in the details that are missing in Mark.

Mark did not mince his words. Mark is trying to teach us that we shouldn’t expect a perfect ending. Because, in the end, things will always

work out the way they should, but that might not be the way we thought it was going to be...

And that's a scary thought, confusing and bewildering, but real.

Jesus didn't come to earth to give all of us that perfect ending to our story. Humanly speaking, in any case. Because things happen to us that we don't understand. We get unwell, we get left behind, we get misunderstood, we feel alone, we worry, we get hurt...

Because at some point, all of us will have to die too. And to be honest – that thought is quite scary. If it were up to us, we'd probably choose to stay alive and be happy forever.

But that's if we look at it from a human perspective! With the little knowledge we have about life – death is not a happy ending - which brings me to the front page story I read in the local West Lothian Courier about the wee boy who died from cancer. In this article the journalist wrote and I quote: "The way he faced all the trials and tribulations of the last months was both heart wrenching and awe inspiring. However, a happy ending was just not to be."

But Jesus came to change that completely. Because of Easter, death is not an ending at all. It's the beginning of a different part of our lives. The part where we will be with God - forever. I don't think you get closer to perfect than that - something that I wish I could tell the journalist of this story.

So with the open ending to his Gospel, Mark teaches us that life might not be perfect, and we might experience different things from what we were expecting, and that that's okay.

Because while we are on earth, we won't have to go through anything alone. God will be with us, because he loves us. The resurrected Jesus confirms that.

Through Jesus, God came close to us and broke down all the "imperfect" things that existed between Him and us.

On Good Friday the nails were hammered in his hands. On Easter Sunday, these nails were pulled out of all our hands, so to speak:

- So although we still sometimes cry, we can now cry with hope.
- Although we might sometimes feel alone, we can know that in reality we're not alone, because God is always there.
- Although we get hurt, God puts a dressing on our wounds.
- Although we don't always understand everything that happens to us, we can accept that we don't have to.
- Although our bodies get broken, we can know that the end of our bodies is not the end of our lives.
- Although we still have to die – that is just the doorway to God.

Humanly speaking - Mark's Gospel might not have the perfect ending. And life here on earth might not be anywhere close to perfect. We are not perfect.

But Jesus is alive! And that is pretty perfect!! And let us take His hand with the scars of damage done by human nails and walk with HIM, now and always.

Amen