

Mark 16:1-8

...and they said nothing to anyone for they were afraid...

This verse is regarded as the oldest ending of Mark and is well reported in the early church. Many scholars now believe the writer intended to end with these words and we know verses 9-20, which contain material about the resurrection which is consistent with the endings of the other gospels, were added later. There is a logical reason for the additional material in Mark, but why did he originally provide us with a grammatical and theological problem by ending as he did? The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is asserted by an angel but the women do not comprehend the meaning of what is said. There is no joy, only fear. Nothing they see or hear convinces them things are any different from how they were on Good Friday. What Mark shows by his ending, and throughout his gospel, is that the journey of the disciples is one of despair and defeat; full of fear and disbelief they end in silence and disarray.

The ending may be a joke between Mark and the reader. After all, Mark eventually wrote his book. Because of the way Mark begins his Gospel we have to allow that he is alive with the new life which he and others did not expect to see or feel. Therefore it is with his ending that his gospel witnesses to the faith of Easter. Resurrection faith is the knowledge that God succeeds in spite of us and without our aid. His ending testifies that even silent, fearful, uncomprehending followers cannot bind the living word of God. It will not be held back by unbelief any more than God's gift of new life can be quenched by Jesus' death and the heavy stone at the front of the tomb. God created the world from nothing, brought new life where no possibility of life could be expected. Easter Day witnesses that the cross is not the last word. Death does not hold the ultimate power. Jesus is out, and goes before his disciples into the world, calling us to meet him there. So may we do that, and allow the next chapter of Mark to be written, in us.