

Ivy and I have a routine for Friday evenings. We go out to dinner, then come home and watch two episodes of a TV show (no binge watching). For at least a year we were following a show recommended by Susan, called Murdoch Mysteries. It is a sort of police procedural set in Toronto beginning in mid-1890 – a time of incredible innovations: the telephone, cars, light bulbs and phonograph players, pizza and hot dogs on a bun. These inventions are woven into the show's plot, along with suspenseful adventures of the main characters.

We really enjoyed this until we reached the last season. The final show ended with all the characters in terrible trouble. What would happen next? The answer was nothing, The end. Roll the credits. I was frantically searching the internet to see if there was to be any more of the series.

I bring this up because that's just where we are with the end of Mark's gospel. Three women followers came to the garden where Jesus was buried, to anoint his body. They saw that the huge stone has already been rolled away from the opening of the tomb, but there was no one there except a white robed figure acting as a kind of receptionist. "You wanted to see Jesus? Sorry, you just missed him. He has been raised and has gone to Galilee. You need to tell the other disciples, and all of you go there to meet him." The women were amazed and terrified. They ran away and told no one. The end. Roll the credits.

Is that any way to finish a gospel? And like me with the TV series, many have frantically searched for a more satisfactory conclusion. After all, the women must ultimately have told someone what happened, since the church knew of and believed in the resurrection.

Some people hypothesize that there was a last page of Mark that had been lost, which would seem remarkably careless. Another approach comes from transcribers of scripture of the first two centuries, who couldn't stand to leave things in such an unsatisfactory state. So they added some verses of their own, giving the Bible not one but two more endings, one shorter and one longer. But the consensus of scholars is that the gospel originally ended at verse eight, just as you heard it tonight.

Mark's gospel began without any stories concerning the birth of Jesus or even a poetic introduction about his incarnation. Now it ends without any post-resurrection appearances. In Mark's account, the beginning just

says it's the beginning. The ending says to go back to the beginning. And start again.

Mark wrote this history of Jesus for his own embattled community of Christians. They had already lived through a great persecution by the emperor Nero; now the complete destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, threatened to scatter them. The written gospel was meant to hold them together by reminding them of the ministry of Jesus: the teachings, the healings, the things surrendered by the disciples in order to follow.

It was written for people who already knew some of the story for which they suffered. Mark wrote it all down, to remind them and to keep them on the way. I believe that he stopped where he did because the end of the story had not yet been lived. Those who read his account of the Good News of Jesus would write the next chapters in their lives and witness.

This is the heritage that we receive. In Mark's gospel the beginning simply says it's the beginning. The ending says to go back to the beginning. And start again. And live the next chapter that continues the story. As with every generation of believers since the first, our discipleship will give its own account of the Jesus Way in our time, meeting challenge, making response.

Sometimes the path is rocky and filled with detours. But we also receive the powerful assurance given to the first disciples. If you recall, the message to the women at the tomb was, "{Jesus} has been raised ...he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you." We don't need to hang around graveyards, looking for traces of Jesus or evidence for faith. We just need to keep going ahead to meet our Lord on the way.

Whatever we might face, we were not alone. Jesus has gone ahead of us. If the future brings defeat and death, Jesus has gone ahead of us into that as well, and is already present there. When you leave here tonight Jesus is going ahead of you. In your home, your work, your struggles to be faithful, Jesus has gone ahead of you. For he has been raised from the dead, to be forever out in front, leading us on and on into the future. Christ is risen. He is risen indeed.