



Rev Helen Jacobi
Breaking the silence

Isaiah 25:6-9

Mark 16:1-8

Easter Day

4 April 2021

Any writer of novels or scripts for film will tell you how important endings are. And we the readers or viewers would agree. In the old days of one episode a week TV the ending had to make you want to come back for more next week. Even on Netflix we still have to want to press play for the next episode.

Well, Mark the gospel writer, didn't go to the "how to write good endings" class. His gospel ends in the middle of a sentence.

"The women went out from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; they said nothing to anyone, they were afraid for..."

That's how it reads in Greek, ending the sentence and the Gospel with a preposition. The most important story of the Christian faith just stops and the end just hangs out there.

We know how it ends (like in the children's version we just read); the disciples see the risen Jesus – right? he eats fish with them on the beach; they talk, they touch him. Well, not in Mark's gospel.

Lamar Williamson says "When is an ending not an end? When a dead man rises from the tomb, and when a Gospel ends in the middle of a sentence."¹

Several ancient versions of the Gospel attempted to fix this anomaly by adding another ending. Most Bibles print 3 different endings for Mark.

¹ *Mark: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*
p283 2009

The so called longer ending of Mark has an appearance to Mary Magdalene, like John's gospel; a short description of the Emmaus story from Luke and a command to go into all the world – like the ending of Matthew's gospel. But the style of writing is so different that you can tell, even in English, that these were added by another hand, by someone who wanted to make Mark's Gospel sound like the others, by someone who wanted an ending.

Even back then, there was some editor who was saying: "We can't have this. We need a conclusion! We need to wrap this up so that, we can bring up the background music, roll the credits and let people leave with a good feeling about this. We can't have: "they said nothing to anyone for they were afraid!"²

In any other year I would say it is hard for us to relate back to the fear and uncertainty of that first Easter Day. We have centuries of theology, of paintings, of music, of films, which somewhat sanitise the Easter picture and make it full of happy images, even with a few fluffy chicks creeping in. But this year we have had plenty of fear and uncertainty swirling around us.

The shroud Isaiah describes has well and truly covered us. We don't know how the world's covid story is going to end. We can't make any plans really. We hope for a better ending but we can't be sure. So maybe we can relate very well to this gospel with no ending. Or an ending that is only fear and silence.

The feminist theologians always remind us in the other gospels that it was the women who first spread the good news of Jesus' resurrection. But here even the women are silenced, or have not yet found their voice.

This in a way is typical of Mark's gospel, the disciples are no heroes, they don't understand who Jesus is. Nobody gets it really. And earlier in the gospel the disciples are told not to say who Jesus is for fear of the Romans and for fear of being misunderstood.

² <http://www.csec.org/index.php/archives/23-member-archives/264-cynthia-campbell-program-4427>

Mark's account is very real - of course the women would have been terrified. Most of the disciples were already hidden, their teacher and leader had been brutally killed, for all they knew they could be next. The Roman rule was very oppressive and their hopes for a revolution had been dashed.

And yet out of love for Jesus the women went to the tomb, to tend the body as was their custom. It had not been bathed and anointed as was fitting. And they wanted to complete their tasks. But to their horror, even this last dignity was taken away from them. The body was gone. This year millions of families across our world and some in Aotearoa have had to forgo the last moments with a loved one and being able to hold proper funerals. They can relate to the sorrow of the women.

There was an angel at the tomb, but seeing an angel doesn't really help – just one more thing to make you scared.

On Good Friday I always feel that our only response when confronted with the crucifixion of Jesus is one of silence. We are left wordless in the face of the pain and forsaken-ness of it all. But on Easter Day we come expecting joy and song, not silence. Today we have silence again; even from those women.

How often I wonder do we find ourselves silent? Silent when we have good news to share, or silent when we have fears to share. Silent about the things we really want to do or say; silent about our dreams because we are worried we will seem silly, or silent about our hopes because no one else might share them. Or are we silenced – silenced by a bully at work or school, silenced by lack of money or skills, silenced by poverty, or illness, silenced by an abuse of power. Silenced or perhaps just paralysed by the uncertainty covid brings.

Over recent months we have heard from another group who have long been silenced.

The Royal Commission on Abuse in Care has heard many stories of those abused over the decades in our churches, church institutions and schools. The stories are harrowing and deeply shameful for the church. What is even more shameful is the lack of appropriate response also over decades and even recently.

At last with the help of the Commission that is changing but there is still much work to be done. We have to make certain no one is ever silenced again.

We don't know how the women of Mark's gospel found their voice. But I'm guessing it was something to do with remembering how much Jesus loved them and they him. And thinking again about the angel's instructions to go and tell. And remembering many of the confusing things he had taught them about the first being last; and losing your life to find it; and the poor being blessed. And then finding within themselves a seed of hope which said – maybe – maybe – he has come back to us.

Mark's gospel ends abruptly but I think maybe he knew that was where everyone else's story would pick up and continue. And by not giving us the script, the next part of the story is so much more our own; for our time; and our own context. Your story and mine is the next chapter. What we do with the Jesus story is the next chapter. When you find your voice this Easter day what story will you choose to tell? The women eventually told what they had seen that first Easter Day. An empty tomb. The hope Jesus had brought them in life was real in death also.

What hope can you add to the story today? Can we claim it; claim life and love and hope, in our covid world of uncertainty and so much loss. Can we claim life and love and hope even when we hear terrible stories of abuse.

The prophet Isaiah said that God will destroy the shroud that is cast over the nations, wiping away tears and disgrace. God doesn't wave a magic wand to do this. God brings us Jesus who has suffered; God brings us the empty tomb; God brings us the women who were witnesses, who eventually found their voice and were no longer silent.

God invites you and me to finish the story, to provide the ending of this episode and the beginning of another one as we walk the way of Jesus, the Risen One.