

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

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It's Easter Sunday! Alleluia! Christ is risen! That's an A+ for those of you who just responded, "Christ is risen, indeed. Alleluia!" Regardless of your response, I still have a question after today's gospel: Where is Jesus? I mean, Mark's gospel doesn't tell of a resurrection appearance like John's account, and that's a little odd, right? Like, isn't this Jesus's big day, and now he's nowhere to be found?

Well, Mark is certainly an interesting gospel, and in my opinion, not a very compelling storyteller about this whole resurrection thing. In fact, most scholars believe that the gospel's earliest ending is where we stopped today. That is, concluding with the women fleeing in terror, fear, and silence. But, again, I ask, "where is Jesus?"

It is a question that some of us have asked this last year. And, if it isn't the question, "where is Jesus," then maybe it's "where is God?" After all, we've witnessed 2.8 million lives literally end because of COVID—with about 20% of the COVID deaths happening here in the U.S., and to put that in perspective, we only have 4% of the world's population.¹ Or how about, the increased levels of hate crimes against Asian American and Pacific Islanders? Or, the impacts of climate change resulting in extreme weather tearing apart homes, flooding cities, and contributing to the collapse of power grids. All of that makes me wonder, "where is Jesus?"

¹ "The wages of sacrifice." *The Christian Century*. March 24, 2021.

And, where was Jesus when George Floyd gasped for air for over nine minutes,
or when the mob attempted a coup at the United States capital,
or during any number of mass casualty events caused by guns, bombs, or
other weapons?

This is a question that goes beyond that first Easter event 2,000 years ago.
Instead, it's something that has been oh, so real this past year.

So, again, I ask, "where is Jesus?"

In today's gospel, a young man gave an answer when he said, "Do not be alarmed... [Jesus] is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you." It's those words that set up Mark's conclusion. And, it's so vague. It's not the clear-cut ending that so many of us crave. Rather, it is open-ended and filled with possibility. And, frankly, we should have known this cliffhanger was coming. After all, from the very first sentence, Mark said this was going to be "The *beginning* of the good news of Jesus Christ..." Mark told us that these roughly 15,000 words were never meant to be the definitive story of Jesus. The author probably wanted us to read and re-read this short book to look for clues as to what could likely be next. To do that, we need to understand the essence of Jesus's life. Then, we can discover Jesus's location, and *we* can be the ones to share. Does that make sense?

So that we can do that work, let's do a quick review. The trajectory of Mark has been about Jesus as the Messiah—that is, Jesus as the one who delivers the Judeans, the Jewish nation. Throughout those 15,000 words, it becomes apparent that people have pre-conceived ideas about what the messiah must be like and how the messiah would act. For example, it must be

someone who defeats the Romans with military might. So, imagine how frustrated people were when Jesus made non-violence his hallmark. Imagine how confusing it was to see the military ruler they sought nailed to a tree and executed as a criminal. Imagine their reaction when they realized that God's reign was going to be built on a vision of equity, love, and peace. But, to those of us who have witnessed Jesus's life unfolding, it's those things that are going to help us to find where Jesus might be!

And, after Mark's gospel was written, others tried to add their version of what a conclusion to the story might look like. A shorter ending has the women telling others about their experience. A longer ending tells us of Jesus's appearance to others, a sending of the disciples, and a nice final scene where Jesus ascends into heaven and is gone.

Now, the longer version is how you END a story with a nice neat bow, but that probably wasn't what Mark was looking to do.

You see, Mark wants you and me to take what we now know about Jesus and keep an eye out for Christ's presence like we're playing "Where's Waldo?" Mark wants us to be on the lookout for glimpses of Jesus in everyday places where we might not expect God's presence.

Mark wants us to look for Jesus in the unvaccinated checkout clerks who have helped keep our pantries full for over a year.

To look for Christ in the sacrifice of plastic or meat to help reduce climate change and bring about abundant life for all.

To look for Christ's presence when standing up against hate in all its forms at work, at school, and in the church.

You see, Mark wants us to be on the lookout for Christ who is found among us here and now.

And, there's something really refreshing about that. There's something life-giving in knowing that God is among us and that we only need to notice God's work. So, in the weeks ahead, that's our Easter challenge. As a community, we'll be encouraging you to "spot, snap, and share!" A little later in the service Vicar is going to give you the details, but the gist is that we want YOU to help us all be on the lookout for glimpses of God. We want YOU to help continue Mark's gospel, to contribute to the good news of Jesus Christ, and to acknowledge that the gospels are future-oriented moving us towards God's presence among us.

So, it's a beautiful day outside here in Chicago, so I want to get you away from the screen and on to "spot, snap, and share." But, before we depart, know that God's love is immersive, expansive, and ever widening—so be on the lookout. Know that you are loved, and from that love you too can love one another. So, feel empowered by God's grace, and then, get out there and discover where Jesus has gone. Amen.