

16<sup>1</sup> When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. <sup>2</sup>And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. <sup>3</sup>They had been saying to one another, 'Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?' <sup>4</sup>When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. <sup>5</sup>As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. <sup>6</sup>But he said to them, 'Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. <sup>7</sup>But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.' <sup>8</sup>So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

Did anyone watch Basil Brush when they were younger. For those who didn't, Basil is a fox puppet with a big bushy tail and a loud laugh. During each episode of the Basil Brush show, there would be a story time, and each week it would finish on a cliffhanger – to entice you to watch the next episode. Basil would protest to his human friend, who he called Mr whatever. The one I remember was Mr Derek.

If Basil had been reading Mark's gospel, then when he got to Mark 16:8, he'd be saying "You can't leave them like that, Mr Derek..." "

It is a strange ending, and it seems very sudden to leave the women with an empty tomb, a mysterious young man in a white robe, fleeing the scene afraid. The more familiar scenes of the risen Jesus appearing to his followers and talking with them are found in the other three gospels, but not Mark, which most people believe is the first to be written down.

In your Bible you might see an extra section of the Gospel printed – verses 9-20. However, these are missing from the oldest and most reliable Greek manuscripts and seem to sum up what we know of the risen Jesus from the other gospels. They are in a very different style. It looks like there was a desire to round it off properly. Most Bibles have footnotes that explain this.

Various theories have sprung up as to why the original ends so suddenly. One suggests that the last part is missing – that the manuscript was either damaged or not cared for as much as it should have been, and was eventually lost for ever. If that is true, it begs the question why it was circulated in this incomplete form, even before the extra section was added.

Others have suggested that Mark was interrupted, especially as persecution was well underway at the time it is likely that he was writing – around 65-70AD. Either he was unable to write any more, or even he was martyred. If that is the case, it's remarkable that the Gospel survived at all.

A third possibility – and I have some sympathy with this – is that Mark ends where it does for deliberate dramatic effect. Jesus does disturb people in Mark's gospel – he is a mystery, they ask who he is, and they are recorded as being filled with awe. I just wonder whether Mark wanted to leave us thinking about that, rather than feed us all of the answers. Even if didn't, and his ending was lost, the effect has been to create a gospel that does just that.

16:6 The young man tells the women not to be afraid, and that Jesus is risen. Mark leaves us in no doubt that something extraordinary has happened. He reports that the tomb is, in fact, empty, and he tells us that Jesus is alive. More than that, the women are told that Jesus is going on ahead of them to his disciples and will meet them in Galilee. No-one reading the authentic text of Mark's gospel that we actually have could be left in any doubt that that is what he is saying.

So what lesson or question might we draw from this abrupt ending this morning? Mark doesn't leave us with any image or story as to what meeting the risen Lord Jesus is like. We get those images from the other gospels – Mary in the garden, Doubting Thomas, the Road to Emmaus and so on.

Mark leaves us wondering what meeting the risen Jesus is like, rather than telling us exactly what we should expect. Of course, that is closer to our reality than those well-known gospel appearances. We won't meet the risen Jesus in bodily form as the disciples did – at least not in this life. The fact that Mark doesn't feed us with a template for how to meet the risen Jesus I find strangely liberating, because it leaves it open.

The end of his Gospel leaves me with this thought. Perhaps there is an answer to the question "what is the next page of Mark's gospel?" And the answer is this: "You are".

Mark's gospel as we have it doesn't bring the story to a close; it suggests it goes on – that there is a sequel, and that sequel will be people discovering that the Jesus he describes in history can still be a living reality in the lives of generations to come.

So, Basil, you don't need to wait for a new instalment of the resurrection next week; you need to live it now, and write some more of your own story.

Amen.