

Mark 16:1 - 8

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Where is the darkest place on earth? I once stood at the bottom of a mineshaft, 4,100 feet below the surface, while the guide turned off the lights. An indescribable blackness descended. No ray from the sun or moon, star or a streetlight can reach that place. It was as dark as death and you realise how terrifying and hopeless it would be to be trapped there.

The remarkable thing is that even the smallest candle would be strong enough to drive back the overwhelming blackness.

**...and they said nothing to anyone for they were afraid...** This verse, regarded as the oldest ending of Mark, is well reported in the early church. Many scholars now believe Mark intended to end with these words and we know the following verses 9-20, which tell the story about the Resurrection consistent with 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 that literally caused his story to end in darkness?

Or did he? The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is proclaimed but the women do not comprehend the meaning of what is said. There is no joy, only fear. Throughout his gospel Mark shows that the journey of the disciples is one of misunderstanding and now it finishes in silence and disarray. But the candle of life and hope is alight in the words of the angel. Therefore it is with this, and his ending that Mark witnesses to the faith of Easter. Resurrection faith is the knowledge that **God succeeds in spite of us and without our aid**. Even silent, fearful, uncomprehending, followers cannot bind the living word of God. It will not be held back by unbelief or quenched by any other power. God who created the world from nothing, brought new life where no possibility of life could be expected. 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 respond, and allow the next chapter of Mark to be written, in us.

A journalist wrote of Easter in a Greek village. The service commenced in complete darkness at midnight. The priest emerged from the holy place carrying the newly lit Easter Candle. All the members of the congregation lit smaller candles from it. Gradually the church was filled with new light.

At the completion of the liturgy the villagers wound their way homeward, carrying their candles through the dull light of the early dawn. Slowly the homes of the village were filled with the gentle light of Christ.

There is no better sign of our Easter hope than a lighted candle. Although we know of bad times, dark times, death and destruction, we know that the last word belongs to God, who has not left us, and will not leave us without light and hope.

Christ is risen! **Indeed, he has risen!** Thanks be to God.