

## Easter 2021: The Unfinished Story

**Christ is Risen! He is risen indeed!**

**Grace and peace to you from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ...**

Irish novelist (and short story writer), James Joyce, is regarded as one of the most influential and important writers of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century... He is known for such titles as *Ulysses*, *Homer's Odyssey*, and writing in an *avant-garde* literary style known as 'Stream of Consciousness'...

But it was Joyce's final work, titled *Finnegan's Wake* that is possibly his most famous (and the one that most people have never read)... incorporating poetic language, coined words, and seemingly nonsense phrases the book is either the work of a genius (beyond most people's ability to appreciate), or the ultimate practical joke from a literary prankster...

Either way, one thing is certain: in as much as *Finnegan's Wake* has a plot at all (and critical opinions differ on this point) it *certainly* has no ending; the final line in the last chapter of the book (is actually the beginning of the first line from the first chapter of the book), making the whole thing an endless loop that you can simply continue reading, onward, forever...

I share that with you this morning because Mark's Gospel is a lot like *Finnegan's Wake*... in that, the last chapter of the book (chapter 16) seems to end abruptly – ambiguously – and abstrusely...

Now like the other three Gospels - Mark does tell us that Mary the Magdalene and her companions make their way to the tomb (that first Easter Sunday morning) – it tells us that they were worried about rolling away the heavy stone from its entrance – and when they arrive they *do find* an empty tomb (albeit with a mysterious unnamed, *young man* who's dressed in a white robe – rather than the 2 angels mentioned in John's Gospel)... but listen to how Mark ends the Easter story...

He writes: “*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 that they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.”*”

And then it ends at verse 8 by saying, “*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*”...

Now I do realize that if we opened our Bibles we'd see that it says, '*the shorter ending*' and '*the longer ending*' – adding 11 extra verses to Chapter 16...

The only problem is that those verses were added many decades later (and do not appear in any of the original manuscripts)... what's more – two of the most important church theologians – Clement of Alexandria and Origen (two heavyweight theologians who were writing in the early 3<sup>rd</sup> Century) show no knowledge of these verses... the language and style of the Greek that appears in these verses is also clearly not in Mark's style – which makes most respected scholars conclude that the Early Church found Mark's ending so deficient (that they borrowed from Matthew, Luke, and John in order to create a proper ending to the Easter story)...

And so, the question is, "what happened?"... and why doesn't Mark do a better job at trying to convince us of the resurrection?... in fact, unlike the other Gospel writers he doesn't provide any post-resurrection stories of Jesus – he doesn't provide any eye-witness accounts - or try to tie things together neatly with a really good fulfillment prophecy at the end – and he certainly doesn't finish his story in a way that makes sense *to most of us*... in fact, all it tells us is that *they were afraid*, and then goes on to say, "*and they said nothing to anyone*"... THE END... AMEN... LET'S PRAY...

So, what's going on here?... and why would Mark finish the *best story ever told* in such a strange manner?... and why wouldn't he tell us more about that first Easter Sunday morning?...

Well, as you can imagine there have been many theories as to why Mark's Gospel ends so abruptly... one theory is that while Mark was writing it – he died before he could finish it (causing the Early Church to finish it for him)... someone else once suggested that perhaps the true ending of Mark's Gospel simply got lost (and the Early Church just wrote down what they remembered hearing)... still another person suggested that the ending of Mark's Gospel was intentionally destroyed (whether it be by an act of Satan or those persecuting the Church at the time – and this is all that we have left)... and to be honest with you – I think that each one of those theories is certainly possible... I mean, why not?...

But do you know what I also wonder?... I wonder if Mark knew exactly what he was doing (and that his telling of the first Easter Sunday morning is perfect – *just the way it is*)... and I say that, because on the one hand, this strange unnamed young man that appears in the tomb tells us to look for Jesus in Galilee (exactly

where the story began)... and so, like Finnegans Wake it encourages us to go back to the beginning of the story (to meet Jesus - again and again)... and each time we do (our eyes might be opened to see the Risen Christ in our lives - just a little bit more)...

But even more importantly than that, I think Mark knew (what we know to be true as well) that the Gospel of Jesus Christ didn't end on that first *Easter Sunday morning* (but is an *unfinished story* that we continue to tell with our own lives) from generation to generation...

and in that way, we become part *of the story* (each one of us with our own experiences, our own eye witness accounts, and our own testimonies of where we see the Risen Christ in the world today) – and how our own lives have been touched, or changed, or healed because of our Savior... and in that way, I think Mark has purposely *left us* an unwritten page (so that we, too, become PART OF THE EASTER STORY) and not just observers along the way... but as part of this unbelievably wonderful story (that continues still to unfold) with every generation who's blessed enough to read it...

And yes, it would be nice if someone could convince us *with just the right words* that might take away all of our doubts (and answer all of our questions) – but I think Mark knew (what we know to be true as well) that the true blessings of the Resurrection (and the real joy of Easter) cannot be explained away (in a neat little package – with the perfect happy ending to satisfy every question of every age) but can only be experienced (when we put our faith in what God can do *with our own lives today*)... which is why, I believe, that Mark *let's us finish the story* - for ourselves...

As many of you know, I always close my sermons with a story – but today as we think about Mark's invitation to finish the Easter story for ourselves – let me leave you with a question to think about instead... and the question is: what will your witness add to the story of Easter and what will you tell the world about the Risen Christ?... answer that question and you will find your place in the story...

Well, I don't know about you, but do you know what I am going to tell them?... I'm going to proclaim: "*Christ is Risen*" – **He is Risen Indeed!..**

In Jesus' name we pray...

**Amen!**