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ARCHIVES

# New and Old in Mark 16:1-8

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[One of the most difficult pericopes in the New Testament is the Easter Gospel, Mark 16:1-8, because it reports no appearance of the risen Lord, and ends with the strange words, "... and they said nothing to any one, for they were afraid." In this article, the author summarizes and evaluates the chief solutions that have been proposed, and then offers his own solution. On the basis of his study of the message of the Gospel and of other pertinent Biblical materials, he finds that the conclusion reflects a real appreciation of the joyful Gospel message. He also argues that in a sense the ending is incomplete, for Mark used the "incomplete ending" to say to each reader that it was up to him and to her to carry on "all that Jesus had begun both to do and to teach."

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Mark 16:1-8 is a problem at several levels:

1. As the Gospel for Easter Sunday, it strikes many as curiously disappointing and low key amid the lilies, the augmented choir, the full congregation, the spring finery. The congregation stands as the pericope is read but feels let down by words that are not quite triumphant or strong enough: "And they said nothing to any one, for they were afraid." That seems a sour note on which to end a Gospel. It is unfinished. In many congregations in spite of the lectionary the pastor reads also vv. 9-20 or substitutes for Mark one of the fuller accounts of the events of Easter morning.

The late Luther D. Reed judged this pericope to be "inadequate in that it describes only the empty tomb and does not include an appearance of the risen Christ."<sup>1</sup> The pericope has been read as the Easter Gospel since the seventh century but is in danger of being retired from service.

The new Roman Catholic 3-year lectionary has demoted Mark 16:1-8. It will be used as the Gospel for the Easter vigil every third year. The Standing Liturgical Commission of the Episcopal Church has proposed that Mark 16:1-8 be used on Easter only one year in every three. The silence and fear of the women are clearly the offending elements. They were already neatly excised in the older Roman lectionary which prescribed that only vv. 1-7 be read as the Gospel.

2. Matthew and Luke, who surely knew Mark 16:1-8, and John, who may have, proceeded beyond it in various ways in their own gospels. That is a negative judgment—at least in the same sense that writing an article on the pericope is a sort of negative judgment, since it declares that (for the writer at least) the passage needs help.

Matthew and Luke followed Mark closely throughout the passion narrative and also in Mark 16:1-8. For that reason they very much resemble not only Mark but also one another. However, Matthew and Luke diverge from one another radically as soon as they get beyond Mark

<sup>1</sup> Luther D. Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), p. 507.

16:8. That is an indication also that Mark originally ended at verse 8. Matthew and Luke no longer had a common ground between them once they passed that verse. Mark ended, and they each felt the necessity of a fuller conclusion.

3. Scribes in the ancient church regarded Mark 16:1-8 as incomplete and felt that Mark's gospel was truncated. Anonymous Christians in various sectors of the church tacked endings onto Mark in order to round off that gospel. This is no place to try to prove that these endings are not original. They have had their passionate defenders. That is true especially of Mark 16:9-20, printed in the King James version as the text of Mark without any hint of a break. John Burgon in 1871 published a 334-page volume under the title *The Last Twelve Verses of the Gospel according to St. Mark*. The subtitle was "Vindicated against Recent Critical Objectors and Established." As far as he was concerned, any person arguing that vv. 9-20 were not authentic and that the gospel originally ended at 16:8 fell under the condemnation of Rev. 22:18-19, which he printed together with Mark 13:31 and Matt. 5:18-19 on the back of the title page.

The RSV and other modern translations customarily print vv. 9-20 and also another, shorter ancient reading in smaller type after v. 8. A third ancient variant is found in the Washington, or Freer, Codex after v. 14. It reads: "They answered, 'This lawless and unbelieving age is under Satan, who by means of unclean spirits does not permit the true power of God to be grasped; therefore reveal your righteousness.' They were talking with Christ, and Christ replied, 'The limit of the years of Satan's authority has been reached, but

other terrible things are drawing near, even for the sinners on behalf of whom I was delivered to death that they might turn to the truth and sin no more, in order that they might inherit the spiritual and incorruptible glory of righteousness which is in heaven.'"

Few today defend the authenticity of the longer, the shorter, or the Freer ending. Donald Guthrie, a leading conservative scholar, declares that all three of these early endings are on textual and linguistic grounds suspect.<sup>2</sup> He does not believe that the gospel ended with v. 8, however, since that verse forms an abrupt ending and sounds a harsh note. He thinks that the original ending has been lost and is not recoverable.

Each attempt by ancient scribes to augment the pericope is a declaration from some element in the ancient church that it found the concluding pericope to be no conclusion at all.

4. Modern scholarship has had several problems with the pericope. In the first place scholars have felt, like many others, that Mark 16:8 is an awkward and inadequate end to a gospel. Wilhelm Bousset expressed the sentiments of many when he spoke of the "enigma of the abrupt and inartistic" ending of Mark's gospel.<sup>3</sup>

Various reasons have been advanced for the abruptness of the end. Some think that Mark wrote a longer gospel but that some pages have been accidentally lost. Others imagine that the gospel is an unfinished work and that the author took sick, was imprisoned, died, or for some other reason

<sup>2</sup> Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Chicago: Inter-Varsity Press, 1965), I, 74.

<sup>3</sup> Wilhelm Bousset, *Kyrios Christos* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1970), p. 106.

was unable to complete what he had begun. He was cut off in mid-flight.

But even taken by itself, without reference to any supplement beyond it, the pericope presents other difficulties to modern scholars. What follows is by no means an exhaustive review of scholarly opinions. A number of questions are summarized under the names of representative scholars.

#### WELLHAUSEN — BOUSSET — BULTMANN

Julius Wellhausen is apparently the first in a long line of commentators to speak of a "contradiction" between vv. 7 and 8, between the angel's command to take a message (v. 7) and the women's fearful silence (v. 8).<sup>4</sup> Wellhausen further stated that Paul, writing in 1 Cor. 15:3-8, knew nothing of the women's experience and report. Wellhausen's remarks are exceedingly brief, but the idea of a contradiction between the last two verses of Mark is found in developed form in Wilhelm Bousset, *Kyrios Christos*, on whose work Rudolf Bultmann built his own exegesis of the pericope.<sup>5</sup>

According to the Wellhausen-Bousset-Bultmann line, the reference to fear and silence in v. 8 answered the question why the story of the empty tomb had remained unknown in the Christian community for so long. The church is supposed to have spoken at first only of appearances of the spiritual resurrected Christ (1 Cor. 15:3-8). It originally had no empty tomb story. Mark 16:8 provided a cover story for the relatively late introduction of this account.

<sup>4</sup> Julius Wellhausen, *Das Evangelium Marci* (Berlin: Georg R. Reimer, 1903).

<sup>5</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963), pp. 284—287.

#### VON CAMPENHAUSEN

Hans Freiherr von Campenhausen has a different explanation of the pericope.<sup>6</sup> He thinks that it was designed as a polemic against people who were saying that the disciples had tampered with the grave and stolen the body of Jesus. The pericope says that the disciples, far from having staged the empty tomb in deceit, did not even know about the empty tomb until later. There is no link between the disciples and the empty tomb, thanks to the fear and silence of the women.

#### LOHMEYER — MARXSEN

Willi Marxsen apparently agrees with von Campenhausen that the pericope (minus v. 7) asserts that the tomb is empty without any interference on the part of the disciples.<sup>7</sup> The evangelist, says Marxsen, took the tradition (Mark 16:1-6, 8) and made it do additional work by inserting v. 7, which promises that the disciples will see Jesus in Galilee. The problem is, what kind of seeing will it be? Does the angel promise resurrection appearances or the parousia? Marxsen, following Ernst Lohmeyer<sup>8</sup> and others, says it is the latter.

Marxsen thinks that the community for which Mark wrote lived not in Rome but in Galilee. He links the command and promise of v. 7 to the report preserved in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* III, 5, that the Jerusalem congregation, moved by

<sup>6</sup> Hans Freiherr von Campenhausen, "The Events of Easter and the Empty Tomb," in *Tradition and Life in the Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968), pp. 69—77.

<sup>7</sup> Willi Marxsen, *Mark the Evangelist* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1969), p. 86.

<sup>8</sup> Ernst Lohmeyer, *Galiläa und Jerusalem* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1936).

prophecy, abandoned the capital just before the Roman siege of A.D. 66 and fled to the city of Pella. Marxsen expands the meaning of "Galilee." It is not just the traditional northern province; nor is it only the whole territory surrounding the sea, including the Decapolis (Pella, after all, is not in Galilee, literally speaking). But more, Marxsen says, "wherever Jesus is, there is Galilee."

Yet he seems to say that Mark was writing for Christian communities which gathered around the Sea of Galilee in the early 70s. Mark was encouraging those communities to await the parousia and not lose hope. Marxsen focuses on Mark's understanding of the Gospel, offered in Mark 1:15, "The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God has drawn near," and he interprets the promise of seeing in Galilee by means of this paraphrase: "Jesus says, I am coming soon."

#### WEEDEN

Theodore J. Weeden in a recent book on Mark<sup>9</sup> has proposed the astounding theory that Mark 16:1-8 is a polemic, all right, against the Twelve! Only the women and not the male disciples are witnesses of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.

The point therefore is that the women never delivered the angel's message and the disciples never met the resurrected Jesus. Hence the disciples were never forgiven their apostasy and were never commissioned. Indeed, Weeden says, "Mark is assiduously involved in a vendetta against the disciples."<sup>10</sup> He attempts to prove his

thesis in two ways. First he tries to show that Mark always paints the disciples as obtuse and unworthy. Secondly he looks for a setting in the history of the church where such an attack on the disciples would make sense. He decides that the Markan community was experiencing persecutions and the terrors showed no signs of abating. In fact some people felt that their sufferings were destined to last to the end. Meanwhile certain Christians who were pneumatic exhibitionists arrived in the community. They regarded Jesus primarily as a great and mighty wonder-worker. They were themselves filled with the Spirit, as the power of Jesus, and performed signs and wonders.

They had no use and no place for weakness, failure, or service. They boasted of spiritual experiences, pneumatic gifts, and ecstatic union with the exalted Jesus. They enjoyed flaunting their superiority over others, conceived of themselves as an elite within the community, regarded themselves as custodians of esoteric knowledge, and cherished the adulation of lower members of the community.

This is the way in which Weeden fills in the picture of "false prophets" and "false Christs" set forth in Mark 13. For him Mark's Gospel is a sort of drama in which Jesus represents Mark's own position, while the disciples stand for Mark's opponents.

In answering the threat, Mark, according to Weeden, wished to do two things: convince the community to keep faith with the Lord who is returning shortly, and expose the falsity of the position of the opponents by showing that Jesus had not yet returned and could therefore not be resident victoriously in them or in any one else.

<sup>9</sup> Theodore J. Weeden, *Mark: Traditions in Conflict* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

Thus it was that Mark sketched a picture of Jesus as the temporarily absent but soon to return Son of Man. Weeden thinks that Mark wanted to claim that no one had or could have any direct experience of Jesus between His crucifixion and the parousia. No one had seen Jesus alive after the resurrection. Weeden contrasts as polemical opposites Mark's account of the appearance of an angel to women with Paul's report of the appearance of Jesus to the disciples. (1 Cor. 15:3-8)

Weeden accepts the interpretation offered by Lohmeyer and Marxsen that Galilee is the place of Jesus' public ministry, the wider area around the Sea of Galilee where the Markan community worked, and the locus of the expected parousia.

The interpretation of the pericope which follows assumes without any further argumentation that Mark 16:1-8 is the original ending planned by the author. That is, the various supplementary endings that have been preserved from ancient times are not authentic, and the gospel is neither mutilated nor unfinished.

#### TO ANOINT HIM

Jesus had been crucified on Friday. Some of the same women who had seen Him executed and buried (15:40-41, 47), rested on the Sabbath and then went out to the tomb just after sunrise on Sunday. They were not expecting His resurrection. Rather they were fully convinced by what they had seen that Jesus was still a corpse. They went out only to offer the final devotion of washing and anointing His body. That the large stone before the tomb is the only recorded subject of their conversation heightens the suspense for the reader and leads him to make judgments about the

obtuseness of these women and so to distance himself from their convictions. Thus the opening verses of the pericope are a negative but effective preparation for the news to come.

#### HE IS RISEN

It has become customary to say that from a form-critical point of view there are in the Gospel two kinds of resurrection narratives. There are no accounts of the resurrection itself, but, we are told, there are "empty tomb narratives" (Mark 16: 1-8 and parallels) and "resurrection appearance narratives."

However, to call Mark 16:1-8 an empty tomb narrative is mistaken from two points of view. In the first place such a classification focuses on the content rather than on the form. But then even from the point of view of content the label is inadequate.

Formally the pericope has much in common with pronouncement stories, short narratives which serve as settings for a significant pronouncement or saying. Calling it an empty tomb story deflects attention from what is the real center of the story. Corroborating the view that the message is central is the presence of the "young man" or angel. Nowhere previously in the gospel has Mark reported any angelic activity. The impact is all the greater at the end. That is, no other angelic visitor or comment is recorded unless the "young man" of 14:51-52 is to be understood as an angel. He and he alone in Mark is referred to by the identical word *neaniskos*, and attention is drawn in both passages to the manner in which the young man is clothed (*peribeblemenos* in both 14:52 and 16:5). That the young man of 16:5 is an angel is clear enough from the context, the parallels, and from

the way his garment is described (cf. Mark 9:3; Acts 1:10; 10:30; 2 Macc. 3:26, 33; Dan. 7:9). In the earlier passage the young man left his tunic behind and fled away naked, that is, in horror and dread, as Amos 2:16 said the strong man would flee on the terrible Day of the Lord.<sup>11</sup> The two references to the young man are a pair which bracket the passion and resurrection of Jesus. The young man fled in horror and dismay when Jesus was arrested ("no angel can fully bear the sight"), but after the resurrection he sits calmly and proclaims the good news.

The function of an angel is, of course, to bear a message. Here the angel is "sitting," which is the traditional posture of the teacher, and he is "on the right side," the side of favor or good fortune (cf. John 21:6) or of special dignity (Mark 14:62; Matt. 25:33-34). The angel is the bearer or teacher of good news. Indeed, he brings the Easter kerygma: "Do not be amazed; you seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen, He is not here; see the place where they laid Him." (Mark 16:6)

The Easter kerygma proclaims God's resurrection of Jesus "the Nazarene" (1:24; 10:47; 14:67), the one who taught and healed and cast out demons and had disciples around Him. The activity of Jesus had not been brought to an end by His death. He was furthermore "the crucified," a man condemned and executed by human authorities, religious and political, but now vindicated by God.

God has raised and exalted this Jesus. Jesus was not simply brought back to life.

He was transformed so that people cannot point to Him and say, "Look, here is the Christ!" or "Look, there He is!" (Mark 13:21). He is enthroned at God's right hand (14:62) and therefore the angel means more than that the tomb is empty when he declares, "He has risen, He is *not here*." (16:6)

#### GOING BEFORE YOU

After announcing Jesus' resurrection, the angel continued: "But go, tell His disciples and Peter that He is going before you to Galilee; there you will see Him, as He told you" (16:7). Far from expressing any vendetta against the disciples (Weeden), the words are pure grace. They are absolution pronounced upon "His disciples and Peter," better translated as "His disciples and especially Peter," who, in spite of having sworn undying devotion (14:31), had all forsaken Him and fled (14:50) like sheep scattered at the death of the shepherd. (14:27)

"He is going before you" (*proagei hymas*) does not mean that Jesus is heading north to Galilee and will arrive there some days before the disciples. With a direct object *proago* means to lead, to go at the head of, as a shepherd leads the sheep (14:28), as Jesus walked at the head of the band of disciples and drew them along in His wake going up to Jerusalem (10:32), as the crowds "went before" (*proagontes*) and "followed after" Jesus when He entered Jerusalem (11:9). The angel declared that Jesus, raised from the dead, was now gathering the scattered disciples, once again taking His place at the head of the flock, and calling His sheep to follow after Him. The reconstitution of the flock was pure grace. That He reinstated the disciples who had collapsed and failed

<sup>11</sup> For other possible allusions to the prophet compare Mark 14:47 and Amos 3:12; Mark 11:12-14 and Amos 4:9; Mark 15:33 and Amos 8:9; cf. 4:13; 5:8, 18, 20; Mark 14:61; 15:5 and Amos 5:13; Mark 15:38 and Amos 9:1.

Him is simultaneously His word of absolution toward them. The one foundation of the church, the Markan community included, is divine mercy. And He was leading them to Galilee. As Jerusalem was for Mark the place of rejection and death, the city of opposition, so Galilee was the place of Jesus' ministry of teaching and healing, and it was the land where that mission was to be resumed. At the end the reader is taken back to the beginning, back to Galilee where Jesus first announced the nearness of the Kingdom and called men to repentance and faith (1:15), where Jesus gathered disciples and went before them (1:16-20), from which the report of Jesus' activity spread abroad to many people in other districts. (3:7-8)

With Lohmeyer and Marxsen we may agree that Galilee is for Mark more than a geographical locale. Galilee is in Matt. 28:16-20 and in John 21:1-14 intimately connected with the commissioning of the disciples for the worldwide mission. Mark, too, knows that the disciples of Jesus are called to undertake a mission of proclamation to all nations (13:10; 14:9). When Mark records the word that the resurrected Jesus leads disciples to Galilee, he means that "Jesus of Nazareth" (16:6; 1:24; 14:67) was not laid forever to rest at the crucifixion but that He now in a new manner takes up His mission as leader of the disciples. Back to Galilee means back to the beginning, back to a ministry of proclaiming with authority the new teaching that the kingdom of God has drawn near.

#### THERE YOU WILL SEE

The traditional interpretation of Mark 16:7b ("there you will see him") was that the angel promised resurrection appear-

ances of Jesus like those recorded in Matt. 28:16-20, Luke 24:36-43, and John 20:19-29; 21:1-14.

Lohmeyer and Marxsen have played on the fact that the verb "you will see" (*opsesthe*) is the same one which occurs in 14:62, where Jesus spoke to the high priest about the coming of the Son of Man in the parousia. Furthermore we are told that a different form of the verb, namely *ophthe*, is regularly used to indicate resurrection appearances. (Luke 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5, 6, 7, 8)

Resurrection appearances or parousia? Focusing on the form of the verb "to see" (*horao*) is not enough. The verb is very common. It appears frequently and is used with a variety of meanings. It is simply not true that *ophthe* is a technical term for resurrection appearances, nor is it true that *opsesthe* is a technical term for the parousia. These words are used with other meanings, and those events are described with completely different words as well as with other forms of the verb "to see."

It is far more helpful to focus on the use of seeing in the structure of Mark's Gospel. Mark makes a significant reference to seeing at the end of each of the three great sections of his gospel. The public ministry of Jesus closes with 8:22-26, the healing of a blind man. The central section of the gospel, in which Jesus teaches his disciples privately, also closes with the healing of a blind man, 10:46-52. Mark signals to his readers that it takes a miracle to open eyes to see the truth in Jesus, and the truth is that the time is fulfilled and that God is bringing in His kingdom through the Nazarene, the crucified, that is, through one who served and suffered. At the end of the gospel the disciples, unsee-



ing and offended up to that point, are not only absolved and gathered anew but are also promised sight for their blind eyes. As they receive the Easter message and follow Jesus in His renewed mission, they will at long last see.

#### FEAR AND SILENCE

If Mark presented the angel's word as the Good News of the resurrection of Jesus, and if v. 7 points to the absolving, gathering, and enlightening of the disciples, what is the meaning or function of v. 8, in which the women appear to disobey the messenger of God? Is there a contradiction between vv. 7 and 8, as many interpreters declare? Were the women really disobedient to the heavenly vision?

The first part of v. 8 is not difficult. Confronted by a heavenly visitor, the women react with that trembling which always overtakes sinful mortals faced with the holy and divine. "Trembling and astonishment" seized the women, just as people were amazed when Jesus cast out a demon (Mark 1:27), or when Jesus healed the paralytic and forgave his sins (2:12), or when Jesus raised Jairus' daughter from the dead (5:42), or when He stilled the storm (6:51), or when He cured the deaf man with the impediment in his speech (7:37).<sup>12</sup> Thus the first half of v. 8 declares that the women were awestruck in the presence of God's message.

The second half of the verse is more difficult: "They said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid." Some scholars have attempted to demonstrate that 16:8a ("trembling and astonishment") refers to a positive, numinous awe, while the "afraid" of

16:8b (*ephobounto*) expresses a negative, cowardly fear. But the "fear" (same word-stem as in 16:8b) in 4:41 and 9:5-6 refers to awe at the divine and has nothing to do with cowardice. Perhaps 11:18 is a case of a lack of sheer physical courage, but the one other occurrence of "fear" in Mark's gospel (10:32) is ambiguous and could mean either "afraid" or "awestruck." Trembling, astonishment, and fear are frequent responses to divine revelation in Mark. In fact Mark's vocabulary for describing human reactions to divine activity or teaching is richer than that of the other evangelists. Five of the 12 words which he uses throughout his gospel are not found in the other gospels.<sup>13</sup> Mark's recording of reactions is a way of underscoring the marvelous character of the event or announcement preceding. It passes human grasping and human inventing. It is God's doing and it is marvelous. But does it make sense to characterize the "fear" of the women in 16:8b as numinous awe? And how does that relate to their silence?

The two halves of v. 16 are parallel in structure thus:

- A And they went out and fled from the tomb
- B for trembling and astonishment had come upon them;
- A' And they said nothing to any one,
- B' for they were afraid.

If the parallelism is accepted,<sup>14</sup> then we have a twofold gain. In the first place the reaction of B is parallel to that of B'.

<sup>13</sup> See Table 3, "Mark's Vocabulary of Fear, Astonishment, etc.," in E. L. Bode, *The First Easter Morning* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1970), p. 38.

<sup>14</sup> The parallelism of v. 16 was first suggested to me by a former student, the Rev. John Strelan, now serving in New Guinea.

<sup>12</sup> On "trembling" see also Ex. 15:16; 2 Cor. 7:15; Eph. 6:5; Phil. 2:12; on "astonishment" see also Luke 5:26; Acts 3:10.

In the second place the events of A and A' are also parallel. Both A and A' describe the behavior of the women during a limited, circumscribed period of time. For a short time they can be said to have run from the tomb. For the same period of time, while they ran from the tomb, they said nothing to anyone.

Corroboration for the interpretation that the silence of the women was confined to the limited time of the flight is to be found in the clause, "They said nothing to any one" (16:8b). A similar statement occurs in 1:44 where Jesus directed the man He had cleansed of leprosy, "See that you say nothing to any one; but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded" (1:44). The command to silence in that earlier incident was to be observed for a limited duration, namely until the former leper got to the priest. Then he was to show that he had been cleansed. Could he do that without speaking and identifying himself and declaring why he had come? Obviously not.

The language of the command is readily explainable. Jesus was commissioning the man to perform a task which took precedence over the natural impulse to shout aloud his good news to everybody he met. There is a similar case in the Old Testament. Elisha once sent his servant Gehazi on an urgent errand to the house of the Shunammite woman, whose son had fallen ill. He directed Gehazi as follows: "Gird up your loins, and take my staff in your hand and go. If you meet any one, do not salute him; and if any one salutes you, do not reply; and lay my staff upon the face of the child" (2 Kings 4:29). Furthermore, when Jesus sent out the 70 two by two he gave these bearers of the Word

strange instructions: "Salute no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace be to this house!'" (Luke 10:4-5)

On Easter the women were instructed to take a message to the disciples, and Mark understood them as leaving the tomb in awe, so that they were impolite to every woman they met on the way, omitting the sacred obligation to greet their neighbors. The women hurried directly and single-mindedly to the disciples to deliver the news to them first of all. They were not diverted from their duty by the knots of women gathered at the wells of the city or bustling with jars through streets.<sup>15</sup>

Thus the silence of the women, closely combined as it is with a command to deliver a message and with their rushing from the one who had given the commission, has a special and peculiar meaning. In the total context of Mark 16:1-8 "saying nothing to any one" is an idiomatic expression for single-minded devotion to a duty which overrode all other obligations including the obligation to greet people they might have met along the way.

The pericope opens on a dark and negative note. The women moved slowly toward the cemetery to perform their sad duty of completing the last rites for their erstwhile Master. They had in their lives come to a dead end and it was impossible for them even to move aside the great stone, let alone remove the barrier of death that stood between them and Jesus. But at the end of the pericope they ran quickly from the tomb back to the disciples, astonished and overawed by the miracle and

<sup>15</sup> Frederick W. Danker, "Postscript to the Markan Secrecy Motif," *CTM* 38 (1967), 26, has written on completely other grounds of "the silence of the women in their encounter with all others except the disciples."

grace of the resurrection of Jesus. The wonder of the resurrection is mirrored in the reactions of the women. Their initial, realistic facing up to the impressive power of death is in sharpest contrast to their final awe at the good news God had granted them.

#### MARK 16:1-8 AS CONCLUSION

Even if all the foregoing were granted, the objection might still be raised that the gospel seems unfinished. Why did the author not give us just one more pericope or even one more line to indicate that the women carried out their task or how the disciples received the news? As it stands the gospel seems not to come to rest.

In the passion predictions (8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34) rejection and death are followed by the triumph of resurrection. In addition each of the passion predictions is followed by material on Jesus' authority and on discipleship. The saying about the striking of the shepherd and scattering of the sheep (14:27-28) reaches its conclusion not only in the resurrection of the shepherd but also in the gathering of the sheep. Thus Mark's Gospel itself seems to demand a scene depicting the renewal of discipleship. Without such a scene is the reader not left hanging?

Precision and clarity are needed regarding the alleged incompleteness. It is true that the gospel does not come to rest, but that means that the gospel cannot be viewed as completed in the past. It does not recount a story over which the reader can exercise control. The narrative is not at the reader's disposal. The gospel is open-ended. It tantalizes and challenges the reader to supply an ending. The end the author desires is that the reader become a disciple, that he take up his cross and

boldly follow Jesus. Some readers of the gospel become only writers of alternate endings, thereby gaining mastery over Mark's message instead of being overpowered by it.

However, the resolution of the tension caused by the suffering of the Son of God and the persecution of the Christian community is not intellectual but existential. To a community suffering persecution and humiliation, Mark proclaims that the final triumph lies not in the past but in the future. The present is a time for following Jesus on His way, ministering as He did, serving as He served, even bearing a cross if necessary. The promise is that in Christian ministry and service, in losing one's life for Jesus, the disciple will find life (8:34-38). Those who follow Him will "see" Him, the servant of God, as the eternal Son of God, ever one with the Father and sustained by the Father's approval.

The present is a time of service and perhaps suffering, but the future is sure. God has not forsaken His people any more than He abandoned Jesus. As Jesus was resurrected on the third day, so will the disciples be vindicated.

The Gospel according to Mark is by no means incomplete. If the lector read the gospel aloud up to 16:8, then the congregation would lift its voice and cry out, "The Lord is risen indeed!" The kerygma announced by the angel has been transmitted by the women and by many others. The one who hears that Word is summoned by a gracious God to believe that "Jesus, the Nazarene, the crucified," has been exalted, and that God's everlasting grace and approval rest on each one who follows Jesus in His mission and service to the world.

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