

St. Christopher's Episcopal Church
The Rev. Cara Spaccarelli
March 31, 2024
Easter Sermon

Happy Easter! Most of you knew what to expect when you came here this morning. Crowded pews. Dressed-up kids. Sounds of brass and more alleluias than the song Uptown Funk. And you know how this is going to end – in about 40 minutes, some families will get their pictures taken in front of the altar with all the flowers – don't want to waste being dressed up – while others stream out the doors for whatever brunch plans await. Much of our day-to-day lives we walk into with expectations of how things are going to go and how things are going to end. We've done this before, we've seen this before, we know how this goes. Sometimes though, we are surprised. We find ourselves in something we thought we knew, only to discover that we don't.

This experience happened over and over again to me when my kids were young – the movies and books I thought I remembered, encountering again twenty years later, I found out I didn't. One of those books was Dr. Seuss' *The Lorax*. As I read it to my children, I remembered the brightly colored trees, the entrepreneurial Once-lers, the polluting factory, the short furry Lorax warning the people of environmental doom, and being ignored. Page after page, the book was so familiar, until I turned to the last page, and it was blank. Did I miss something? I went back, looked again, the page before depicted a tree-free, smog filled world, with the Lorax tossing one solo seed and encouraging the narrator to plant it, for unless he does, nothing will get better.

Then blank page. No picture of the planting of that one last seed. No images of Once-lers pulling together to foster a new world of light and color. Nothing to show whether that last seed sits dormant or grows into something magnificent. The movie version provides a happy ending, but the book, the book leaves you with an ominous blank page.

The Gospel of Mark leaves us on Easter with a blank page, an empty tomb. All the other gospels show a risen Jesus, repeatedly, but Mark, Mark ends here. No encounter with Jesus, just an empty tomb, a mysterious messenger, and the women running away in fear and amazement saying nothing to anyone. This ambiguous ending made Christian leaders so uncomfortable that a few hundred years after Mark was written, they added 11 verses, some Bibles call it “A Longer Ending” or “An alternative ending”, and in these 11 verses, they were sure to include, not one, not two, but three separate instances of the resurrected Jesus appearing. It’s not just Disney that is only comfortable with clearly happy endings.

The three women were not expecting a happy ending when they came to the tomb this morning. They were going to care for Jesus. Before they left their home, before the sun even rose, they checked to make sure they had everything they needed, the spices to anoint his body. Not only had Jesus been tortured and killed, but he had been denied a proper Jewish burial, and that was **the one** thing they could make right.

What they were worried about was not whether Jesus' body would be there or not, they were worried about the stone, a giant boulder covering the entrance. Who will roll the stone for us? But when they looked up, it was already rolled away. The Greek word for "looked up" can also mean "look again" and it is used two other times in Mark. Both times associated with the healing of blind men. In **looking again**, they saw. In looking again, the women saw. The stone that they expected to see blocking their way, the stone they first saw blocking their way, was gone when they **looked again**.¹

The gospel invites us to look again, not with the eyes of what we expect to see, but with eyes open to seeing what God sees. To entertain the possibility that we don't know how this story goes, we don't know how this is going to end, and see the possibility that God is writing the story in a way that we don't expect but we deeply desire. For good to overpower evil, hope to triumph over despair, resurrected life come from death. That the boulder has been rolled away and there are a lot of blank pages left.

What boulder blocking your view of the empty tomb do you face? What situation do you desire the power of good of hope, of resurrected life to transform, but don't really expect to?

You don't know how this story ends. The one you are in now.

¹ This insight about looking again is from an Easter sermon by the Rev. Frank Logue <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/sermon/look-again-easter-day-b-2018/>

Home life dictated by adolescent drama or a mid-life crisis or, lucky you, both - you don't know how this story ends.

Stressed out by caring for aging parents. Stuck in a job that is too much work with too little impact. People you care about who refuse to speak to you - you don't know how this story ends.

Polar ice caps melting, one person with a weapon can wreak havoc on hundreds of people's lives, 30,000 dead in Gaza, Haiti on the brink of collapse, - you don't know how this story ends.

Dreading the next election cycle and the cultural conflicts and personal divisions it will bring to the surface and the outcomes it has on people's lives – you don't know how this story ends.

A body that once energized your life now hinders you in weakness and illness. Know you have far less days ahead of you than behind you - you don't know how this story ends.

In admitting that we don't know how this story ends, in looking again to see the barriers to a different ending removed, we can see that we can make a difference in the ending. What we say. What we do. It fills the blank pages in ways that are touched with hope and life. Yes, some things are for sure – death, change, taxes. Chaos and the cross may be a part of the story and some stories take longer to finish. Longer than our lifetimes even. There are lot of blank pages for God and us to write together.

The women run away in fear and amazement and don't tell anyone anything. But that's not where their story ends. Clearly they move beyond that and share what they have seen, and in doing so, become a part of hope and life spreading first to the disciples, then to those who never knew Jesus, and then to generation after generation, who have followed their path, daring to look again to see what they don't expect, but God invites them to see and then fill their own blank pages with God.

We all face the empty tomb and have to decide – how will we be part of the ending of this story? Will we run and hide? Will we ignore? Or will we live as if we, empowered and inspired by God, can be part of writing what we believe into reality. Good overpowering evil, Hope triumphing over despair, resurrected life from death.

What story will you write with God?