

Copyright Geist Christian Church, March 31, 2024—Easter Sunday

**Series:** Wandering Hearts: Figuring Out Faith with Peter

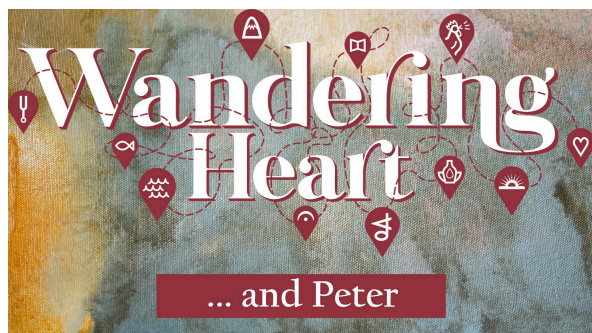
**Sermon Title:** ...And Peter

**Preaching:** Ryan Hazen, Lead Pastor, Mud Creek Campus

**Text:** [Mark 16:1-8](#)

**Email:** [Ryan Hazen](#)

[Watch Service](#)



In this season leading up to this day, we've been following Jesus to Jerusalem through the eyes and ears and heart of Peter. Peter was one of the first disciples that Jesus called to follow him and was often the leader and spokesperson of the group—or better or worse. We've followed Peter because we can see ourselves in Peter. We can relate to his mountaintop experiences and to his valleys. Like us, he's navigating life as he goes, and sometimes he doesn't get it even close to right. His life has taken twists and turns that have led him in different directions.

As we got to the end of Jesus' last supper with his disciples, Jesus predicted that Peter would deny even knowing Jesus not once but three times before daybreak the very next day. By Friday morning, Peter had indeed denied Jesus three times before the rooster crowed. The last we saw of Peter, he was weeping. The service on Thursday night ended with the words about Peter from Luke: "And he went out and wept bitterly" (Luke 22:62). We can only begin to imagine his feelings. He wanted to be loyal to Jesus, but that was getting too risky. If it wasn't already happening, the authorities would be looking for him. If Jesus had been convicted of a crime, Peter could certainly be seen as an accomplice.

While we don't know for sure, Peter was likely hiding without many good options. He must have believed that the love and redemption that Jesus had for him was gone because Jesus was gone. Crucified. Hope had died. Peter the Rock had become Peter the Denier. Any chance at redemption, Peter must have thought, died with Jesus. I imagine Peter, in those post-crucifixion hours, was wondering if life was worth living. Judas ended his life and one has to ask, "Was Peter's shame any less?" Both had sold out on Jesus. It's just that the currency was different. One was silver, one was words. Finding Peter on this day gets ahead of the story, though, so let's go back and start at the beginning of the day.

Each gospel includes the resurrection story, but Mark leaves us with the most questions and ends the story, and his book, in such a way that we want to know what happens next. Mark starts the resurrection story like the other gospels—women going to the tomb at first light on the first day of the week to care for the body of Jesus. Because no work could be done on the Jewish sabbath—and anointing a body

would be considered work—that task has to be put off until the end of the sabbath which would have been sundown Saturday, but going out to the tomb in the dark would be a dangerous trip.

The women's biggest concern is who they might enlist to move the stone covering the tomb's entrance. "They had been saying to one another, 'Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?'" (Mark 16:3). But when they arrive, they find the stone already rolled away and they meet a man who relays the news that Jesus is not there. This man instructs them to "go and tell." That's where Mark falls apart on us. Mark brings the gospel to an abrupt end in the eighth verse, just where I finished it a few moments ago. He tells us that the women go out in terror and amazement and say nothing to anyone because they are afraid.

In fact, the translation I read ends "for they were afraid," but the actual Greek ends by saying, "they were afraid for..." almost like Mark was cut off mid-sentence.<sup>1</sup> Even I know better than to end a sentence with a preposition—a crime that would bring out the ire of my sixth-grade grammar teacher, Mrs. Larkin. I can hear her in my head saying, "Young man, it is 'of what were they afraid?'"

The women were told to go and tell, but they couldn't because of their fear. You call that an ending, Mark? In later years, others—editors or scribes perhaps—added onto the story. They were clearly uncomfortable with how incomplete it felt. Most of our Bibles today contain two more endings to the gospel of Mark, sometimes called the shorter ending and the longer ending. Catchy names, right? You'll find those headings even in the pew Bibles. Add to this the fact that this is the only resurrection story of the four in which Jesus does not make an appearance. It's really not a very good ending. How can Jesus not make an appearance at his own resurrection? I can't blame someone for wanting to fix it.

Or at least that's what I thought until I lived with this text this week and started to give Mark the benefit of the doubt. What if Mark knew exactly what he was doing writing this first account of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus? The rest of Mark is a perfectly good gospel, so why wouldn't the ending be just what Mark wanted it to be? Mark starts his gospel by saying, "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ" (Mark 1:1). What if Mark isn't just talking about this one verse that introduces his gospel but rather is talking about his whole gospel? As in, "THIS GOSPEL is the beginning of the good news?" What if all sixteen chapters are just the beginning, and what if the story really doesn't end with the resurrection of Jesus? What if it's just the beginning?<sup>2</sup>

This would mean that Mark is a genius and he really intended this story to evolve and continue on in the minds and hearts and actions of his readers. This would mean that Mark intends for others to be witnesses to the resurrection—even those who were not eyewitnesses. We rely on witnesses all the time to relate information, don't we? It is rare that something in our culture is not captured on video by eyewitnesses. It allows us to be witnesses. Over the last couple of weeks, a coyote in our neighborhood has been setting off our doorbell cameras, and the image is shared on our neighborhood Facebook group.

---

<sup>1</sup> Discussion of Greek preposition placement from Dr. Cynthia Campbell, President Emerita of McCormick Theological Seminary, Chicago, IL. Found in document "When is an ending not the end?" dated 04/15/2001 at csec.org.

<sup>2</sup> Idea for the beginning of Mark being applied to the entire book and the idea of bad endings from David Lose, Marbury Anderson Biblical Preaching Chair, Luther Seminary, St. Paul, MN and found at the website workingpreacher.org post from 04/01/2012.

We rely on witnesses when we ask a friend for a restaurant recommendation or when we're hiring someone to do work at our home. Last week, for the first time since moving here 18 years ago, I thought I would find someone other than me to fertilize our yard. I've never really been a fan of lugging 50-pound bags of fertilizer from Ace to home and then trying to remember when to put them on the yard. I found someone cheap and told Ruth about it and her first question was, "Did you look at their reviews." I hadn't but did and the witnesses to this company were not kind about their level of service. One and a half stars. I found another company.

The way Mark ends the gospel demonstrates that he is clearly in need of someone who will tell others about their experience and follow the instructions of the man in the tomb to "go and tell." That's where we get back to Peter. I really chose the Easter story from the Gospel of Mark this year because of two words that Mark uses in his story. Those two words are "and Peter." On that Easter morning, the messenger says, "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" (Mark 16:7).

Do you hear it now? If you ever looked for a way to explain what grace is, this moment would be a place to start. Those two words, AND PETER, tell you all you need to know about the grace that Jesus offers. Go, tell the disciples AND PETER. Why on earth would this messenger of God sitting in the tomb not just lump Peter in with all the other disciples? I believe it's because God knew Peter needed a little something extra given his state of mind. I believe it's because Peter was doubting if he was even one of the disciples any longer, given that he had denied knowing Jesus not one but three times.

There is such abundant overflowing grace in this simple instruction—"go tell the disciples AND PETER"—that we must not miss it. The message from Jesus to Peter is that "I'm back in your life; you are forgiven. You are mine. You are not an accidental participant in my story, no. I called you, I invited you by name!"

Mark tells us that the women said nothing to ANYONE. I can only explain that as Mark's attempt to communicate how dumbstruck they were at the news because as I look around this space, someone told someone; the news is out! Matthew's, Luke's, and John's gospels assure us that the women did get over their fear and followed the messenger's instructions to go and tell the disciples and Peter.

I am convinced that Mark intentionally wrote this as an open-ended gospel that threatens to end in failure. In so doing, he places the burden of responsibility for telling the good news squarely on our shoulders. What I've come to believe is that Mark is NOT terrible at endings. Rather, it turns out, he's brilliant at endings. By ending his account in this way, he invites us into the story, to pick up where these women left off—to "go and tell" that Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified and has been raised, is going ahead to meet us, just as he promised.

Like those scribes and editors of Mark, we're often tempted to fix "bad endings." But it's not always our call. God will meet us precisely at the point where things seem the worst, not merely to fix things but to redeem them—and us—turning what looks like an ending into a new beginning and taking what looks like a failure and offering it back to us as an opportunity.

God will meet us at the point of brokenness. We may not always see it and may not always understand it, but God will be there. This story doesn't end, not where Mark left off or any of the others tried to end it, but it continues in our own lives. I ask you this morning, on Mark's behalf, to be a witness to the

resurrected Christ—to step into this story and invite others into this story, to take up their role and carry on with the witness to the risen Christ.

One Sunday on their way home from church, a little girl turned to her mother and said, "Mommy, the preacher's sermon this morning confused me." (I'm guess that's how most people feel when they leave this sanctuary). The mother said, "Oh? Why is that?" The little girl replied, "Well, he said that God is bigger than we are. Is that true?" The mother replied, "Yes, that's true, dear." "And he also said that God lives in us? Is that true, Mommy?" Again, the mother replied, "Yes." "Well," said the little girl, "if God is bigger than us and God lives in us, wouldn't God show through?"<sup>3</sup>

Who will let Jesus show through—not just today but tomorrow and next week through your words—through your actions? Who will be a witness to the fact that Christ is risen? May you go through these doors as a witness with your life emanating four words—Christ has risen indeed! When we find ourselves discouraged, not knowing what the future holds, he offers hope. When we're ready to collapse under the weight of life, when our hearts are broken with grief, relationships fractured, wrong choices are made that can't be undone, he offers comfort and grace. Easter happens.

Are you ready to be a witness even in those moments you've felt like Peter? Know that you leave this place with the full acceptance of Christ, the full transformative power of the resurrection, regardless of where you've been or what you've done or how outside the circle of God's love you think you are. You can insert your name instead of Peter's and be assured that you are a part of Christ offered love and grace.

Just to see if you're listening, I'm going to say, "Go tell the disciples and..." and I want you to say your name. "Go tell the disciples and \_\_\_\_\_." Jesus is going ahead of you and there you will see, just like he told you." That is the message of Easter.

---

<sup>3</sup> Story as told by Jerry Shirley, The Gospel of Jesus: When God Shows Through at sermoncentral.com.