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Easter is Us – Mark 16:1-8

It may be hard to imagine here in the desert with today's high supposed to be near ninety, but Mark is a like a toboggan ride down a mountain. Everything takes place "immediately" – no down-time. Jesus hurries from one thing to another at a break-neck pace that catches the ear of anyone who's ever spent much time with this Gospel.

And what makes it especially exciting is that it ends before the end, like a joke without a punch line or a story that misses its point. Here's what I mean: in the oldest and most reliable manuscripts we have (remember, these were written by hand – manu, hand; script, writing in Latin), in these ancient sources, *there is no resurrection appearance of the risen Christ*. Just a proclamation that "He isn't here."

The narrative just ends, with an empty tomb and an angel and people running away. Worse, it ends with everyone terrified, unable to say anything about what they've just experienced, and the very last word is "afraid." It leaves us a scene, a tableau, a moment frozen in time, but it's a moment with tremendous momentum: what happens next?

But in this open-endedness is the beauty of Easter: this *is* the Good News. It isn't just the Gospel of Mark that stops so inconclusively; so do we. We don't end with a period, or even a semicolon: like our Scripture lesson, we end with a comma, because the end we see is not the end. Not for the story of Jesus Christ, the story of God, or the story of us. All of these stories continue, right on past what *seems to be* the end, into God's future.

This is how the whole Gospel of Mark behaves, charging forward, never resting. When this was first written, there was no such thing as punctuation; the flow of written words was only broken by other words, like "and" or "next" or "immediately," but if Mark had had 'em, he'd have used commas everywhere. He's always spilling one story into the next... until he stops, which, remember, is not the end.

That's the way we live, I think. We're always moving from one thing to the next, one thought to the next, one breath to the next, one heartbeat to the next, even when we're asleep.

But the problem with that is its uncertainty. We don't know what's going to happen next in our own personal story, except that it's something, and just like Mark's toboggan ride, our story doesn't really slow down or stop – it just keeps on going until we're tossed out into space, afraid (or at least anxious), wondering where we're going to come down.

How many of you are jigsaw puzzle enthusiasts? Funny, puzzles are some of the first things we give kids to play with, and some of the last things that are left to us.

I remember working on one puzzle as a sick child being watched by my grandmother. That puzzle was a huge undertaking, way past the patience of a healthy kid, and it was a good thing I was so sick and only able to muster enough energy to deal with it.

The problem was, I got right down to the very end, filled up the whole TV tray with the picture, but the puzzle wasn't done.

There was a hole.

And I didn't have any more pieces.

I know an awful lot of people whose lives are like that. Everything looks like it's going to work out, that the space available in the puzzle of life has a corresponding pile of pieces that will fill in the picture when all of them are put in place. And that seems just dandy for now. Maybe you feel like that yourself?

Really, that's the essence of living in the present, isn't it? Living day to day, as Jesus taught: "Give us today our daily bread..." Give us the pieces we need to get through today, put today together, so we can get through today and when it's done, sit back and look at it. Or, forget it and go to sleep.

But for too many of us, when we get close to that end point, it begins to look suspiciously like there aren't going to be enough pieces to complete the picture. That's when the anxiety – or at least the question – sets in. Is everything as ok as I've been trying to tell myself it is? Today, this week, this lifetime?

Which is more than a little like Mark's Easter story. Maybe that's why that last word is "afraid." We get to the place where the writing stops, the story ends, and, you know, it's not over. There isn't a tidy ending. Like that pesky puzzle, there aren't enough pieces, enough words to finish it.

Except.

Back when I was sick and discovered I didn't have the final piece to my puzzle, I sat back and groaned. I felt defeated. And then I felt angry, and searched around where the puzzle box was, hoping I'd find that silly piece. Finally, I hauled myself off the sofa, got down on the floor, and - goodness gracious.

There it was. Right behind the dust ruffle, just out of sight, under the sofa. It wasn't lost, it just wasn't where I expected it to be. I wasn't done with the puzzle – I'd come across another piece. I could keep going.

The missing piece in Mark's story is the risen Christ. And that is the absolute center, the center of Christianity. Christ's resurrection is

what proves that everything that came before, everything that Jesus said about himself and about God is true. The risen Christ exists, just not yet in our sight. The resurrection's results aren't where we expect them. And, the resurrection isn't just one event in time; it doesn't stop, it isn't the end: it launches off.

When I couldn't find that piece, I was afraid I wouldn't be able to finish what I'd started in that puzzle. You and I may well be afraid we won't be able to finish what we've started in this life.

But the piece we need does exist. *We* won't end on "afraid" any more than the story of Easter or the story of the resurrection or the story of the Gospel of Jesus Christ does, even if this Scripture does: there will always be a comma. The next part of the story is waiting.

Because God isn't finished yet. And until God has done with us, done with this world, done with creation, there will always be a comma.

So, Easter is us. What I mean by that is, what took place that Easter morning is what makes us who we really are, underneath these mortal trappings of skin and bone. Easter is the risen Christ, the resurrection, the proof that God works in and through us, that there is more than what we can see to God's great purpose. The resurrection defines our lives as spiritual beings: Easter is like the end of Mark – not really the end, but an empty canvas on which to paint your life in Christ,

the new life, the better life that God has for us when we put our trust in him.

Easter is us – unfinished, like Mark, and like Mark’s storytelling, we’re sliding down the mountain while life opens out in front of us, not knowing what will happen next.

Easter is us – the missing piece, the hole inside each of us, yearning to be made whole, complete.

That yearning has a purpose and a goal, and it *does* have an end. To satisfy that yearning, we have to let God’s love envelop us, let trust and love banish fear, and wait for that pesky puzzle piece to pop into place. As the great theologian Augustine wrote, “Our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee.”

We’re looking for God’s puzzle piece to fill in the picture of who we really are, what we really are. Looking for that piece, wherever it’s hiding. Probably in the place you least expect it. Maybe in your heart this gorgeous Easter morning.

He is risen, indeed! And we shall rise with him, through the power of God.