

Saturday in Easter Week

April 10, 2021

By the Reverend Stephen Gerth

*Acts 4:13–21; Psalm 118:14–18; Psalm 118:24; Mark 16:9–20**

Today's gospel is generally known as the longer ending of Mark. It is printed in many Bibles, Roman Catholic, and Protestant. But these verses are absent from the two oldest Greek manuscripts and many other important manuscripts. Clement of Alexandria, a priest and theologian who died circa the year 215, and Origen, another Alexandrian theologian who died circa the year 254, show no knowledge of Mark's longer ending.¹ That said, this ending is part of the King James Bible of the Church of England and the Bible of the Roman Catholic Church.

It is worth noting that the Roman Catholic and the Church of England's reading for today stops with these words, "And [Jesus] said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation.'" Our appointed reading includes one more verse, the final one, "And they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that attended it. Amen."²

The Prayer Book states, "Any Reading may be lengthened at discretion."³ It is permission that I make a lot of use of. I do not think we should omit odd or uncomfortable passages of Scripture. So, after Jesus' words, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation," the gospel continues with, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it

¹ Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd Ed. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 102–03.

² Mark 16:20.

³ *The Book of Common Prayer* (1979), 888.

will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover.”⁴

For many years, I have used an online site called “Bible Hub.” Last week I finally broke down and contributed for their ad-free access. What I got instead was access to articles for biblical fundamentalists. The intellectual dishonesty surprised me. I went online, canceled, and returned to the version with ads. I can live with ads; I will not pretend that the Bible always means what it seems to say.

It has been a while since I have been verbally assaulted for being a “liberal” Christian—the issues are always either the ordination of women or homosexuality or both. The last time it happened, I decided I would not be caught off guard again. I plan to respond in the future with something like, “I’ll be glad to talk about our church’s understanding of these issues, but first, I want to know if you own slaves? The New Testament, not to mention the Old, says you may. So, what is your church’s position on slavery?”

I like the shorter ending of Mark, which we heard on Easter Day this year. Mary Magdalene and two other women arrive at the tomb with spices and are worried about how they will get in. But they find that the stone has been rolled away. Inside is a young man in a white robe. He said to them, “Do not be amazed . . . He has risen, he is not here . . . tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him.” . . . And they went out and fled from the tomb; for trembling and astonishment had come upon them; and they said nothing to any one, for they were afraid.”⁵

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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⁴ Mark 16:16–19.

⁵ Mark 16:6–8.