

*Choose Your Ending*

I'm uncertain what to say this morning. Some Christianity has been confused lately. So maybe a quick check-in will help guide our focus. How many of you have been to Easter worship here or somewhere else in the last five years? OK. Thank you for coming back. Second, how many of you know how the story ends: what happens to Jesus? Good. No spoilers then.

So what we'll do is simply pick up where we left off, OK? No new material, but dive right in to go a little deeper. For if we pick up where *we* left off, we can ask, should we pick up where he left off?

Although here's the thing: our Gospels leave off in different places. They don't all end exactly the same way. So we may choose our ending.

Let me explain.

First, the fact that any of us celebrated Easter in English any year recently is thanks to what someone did exactly 500 years ago. William Tyndale translated the Bible from the original languages into English. Which had been illegal in England since 1408. Punishable by death. So he did it mostly in Germany and "the Low Countries." He printed 1800 copies, and smuggled them into England hidden in law books, because who wants to to open those?

It's a great story and you should learn more, but here was the big problem. He studied Greek and Hebrew and printed English words that those in power did not like. Tyndale even created some English words that you know: scapegoat, peacemaker, and Passover. Yep: that *English* word began with him. But then it got bad. Instead of using the words approved by the Empire, instead of saying *priest*, he said elder, instead of saying *Church*, he said congregation, instead of saying *penance* he said repentance, and instead of saying charity he said love. I know what you are thinking. In four words he messed with authority, power, a mandated sacrament, and *fundraising*. He busted the system by going back to basics, the founding documents, original intent. So the powers that be — and he invented that phrase too — said this is not good news, this is fake news. And they got all the copies they could to burn them in public. Guess what? That made them more popular, increased sales, and the Empire's anger. So if you are a King trying to suppress certain stories, and you can't control the news cycle, what's the next best thing? Well, it's worse than that. Ten years after translating Tyndale was strangled to death, and then burned at the stake, as though he was a vampire. Some Kings have no sense.

Now let's go back to where we left off, to see where we leave off.

Last Easter we were in Luke, and his is a great story. In Luke at least *four* women come to Jesus' tomb, two men in dazzling apparel are there, like at the Transfiguration, and these dazzling guys say to remember what Jesus said. But, when the women tell this to the men, they don't believe them, and call it, quote, "An idle tale." Luke's Easter involves skepticism.

In Matthew there are *two* women, both named Mary, this time one angel shows up, the guards play dead, women leave the tomb "in fear and great joy," then Jesus shows up and says "Greetings," they grab his feet, and he says "Do not be afraid." Others will see me too.

In John, which we read today, it is still dark, there is one woman who can handle death, burial, and resurrection, but she thinks Jesus is the gardener, and when she hears her name she recognizes him and he says "Do *not* hold on to me," and the disciples lock themselves in a house.

Mark was the first Gospel, and there are *three* women, one young man in white, who asks the women to tell the others, and this is the last line of the resurrection story, word for word in English: "So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they

said nothing to anyone for they were afraid.” The last word of Mark is, *afraid*. Ephobunto, phobio, phobia: exceeding fear and alarm. The end.

Well, that’s it; thank you for coming this morning. (Long pause)

Ooops: I have two more stories.

Some Christianity has been confused lately. Sometimes we’re not clear what to say. Even our Gospels give us diversity. In Luke people who love each other disbelieve each other. In John Jesus says *don’t* hold on to me, and disciples lock the door. In Matthew they *do* hold on, and he says do not be afraid. And in Mark they flee, afraid.

When Tyndale first told these stories in English those in power were not afraid that his translation would confuse people. They were afraid that people would understand it. One scholar wrote that Tyndale believed that the Bible is understandable, because, quote, “God communicates.”

Talk about communication. We’re in the middle of Passover today. This is the day of resurrection. We’re in the middle of war today. At home, sometimes against citizens. And in the Holy Land. Back in Jesus’ day there were a few dozen followers between the men and women. These days there are 2.6 billion Christians. These days some people try to hide their law ideas in the Bible, reversing the old trick. And sometimes they succeed because so few people read scripture. Yet these days we hunger for good news, amidst too much fake news. And the Bible remains understandable.

As of Thursday, depending on your source, between Israel, Iran, and America we’ve fired somewhere between three thousand and twelve thousand rocket-fueled missiles at one another. People are dying and Pope Leo says this does not follow the Prince of Peace.

But then on Thursday one rocket-fueled vehicle named after the goddess of transitions, childbirth, and children, Artemis, left our earth for the heavens, and looked back upon us, sending us pictures of ourselves, our planet, and they seemed to have the same experience that anyone who leaves this atmosphere has: they saw how beautiful and connected and fragile is our creation. Although one of them said that if you look at the earth from space and hold up your thumb, you can make the entire planet disappear into darkness.

William Tyndale inspired us to choose our rockets, in a way. He said that our Bible is not an accessory to be consulted when convenient. It is God’s guide for life. So we can choose the rocket that reveals our fragility, beauty, connection, and hope. Or the ones that always bring bad news. Hold up our finger to creation.

Tyndale gave his life so that anyone can understand and follow God’s resurrection power. Some of us may think that the story of the Prince of Peace is an idle tale. Some of us may lock ourselves away from daily news and good news. Some of us may even disagree with those we love. Some of us run in fear.

Others will hear Jesus say “Do not be afraid.” We’ll hear him say, do not hold on to my *old* body, because there is new life, More to come. Others will see me too, says Jesus. We’ll *remember* what he said about the meek and the peacemakers, about repentance and even how to pray for our enemies. How to share and love and face down any empire that strikes back with our original documents, where we find eternal justice, and hear that God is with us, even to the end of the age.

In *one* way we are part of a faith that invites us to choose our ending. In *every* way we are part of a creation, a people, a humankind, called to pick up where Jesus left off.

There are only three known copies of Tyndale’s first Bible surviving. But we know what it says. It invites our survival. Our congregating, together. Our love. Our diversity. So, choose your ending. We all know Jesus’ choice perfectly well, because we’ve heard his story before, and it hasn’t changed since last Easter. Thank God.