

**Centre Congregational Church, United Church of Christ
The Reverend Dr Scott Everett Couper
Easter Sunday, 10:00am
April 4, 2021**

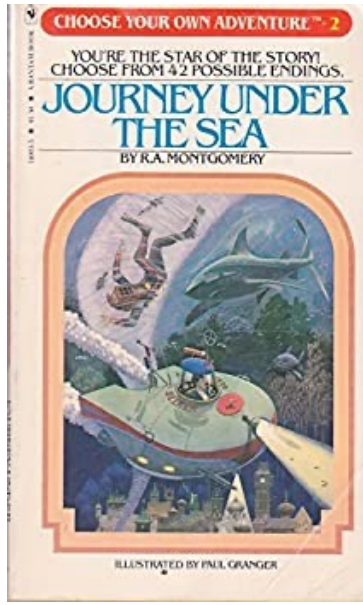
“And...?!?!?!?!”



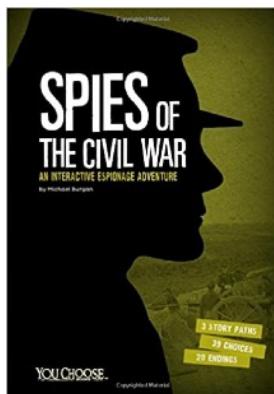
Mark 16:1-18



Yesterday, I went to Everyone's Books and I bought Ana and Lydia two books each for Easter. Lydia is young enough to still need stories read to her, but Ana has grown enough to be able to read them on her own.



One of my greatest childhood pastimes was reading ‘Choose Your Own Path’, or ‘Choose your Own Adventure’, stories. Choose Your Own Adventure stories are told “from a second-person point of view, with the reader assuming the role of the protagonist and making choices that determine the main character's actions and the plot's outcome”.¹



¹ “Choose Your Own Path”, *Wikipedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Choose_Your_Own_Adventure#:~:text=Choose%20Your%20Own%20Adventure%2C%20or,actions%20and%20the%20plot's%20outcome, accessed April 4, 2021.

For example, I bought Ana a book entitled, *Spies of the Civil War: An Interactive Espionage Adventure* wherein there are 3 story paths, 39 choices to make, and 20 different possible endings! How exciting! I loved these books. Why? Because *you* were who the story was about! It was your own adventure. You were the author of the story! You were the story-teller and the story listener all at once! Ah! I was in heaven reading these books.



And, so it is with the story of Easter and the gospel according to Mark, the shortest and the oldest of the four gospels. Mark's original ending concluded with verse 8 when it says:

“You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. **7** But go, tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.’” **8** Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

And the Gospel ended!!! Bam! Right then and there. The microphone dropped. We know the gospel ended with verse 8 because all the earlier

manuscripts ended there and many if not most of the later ones continued on with the story. Apparently, there was at least one early Christian redactor who was not comfortable with a 'Choose Your Own Adventure' Gospel! He had to finish the story, and the story pretty-much resembled those of the other gospels. Yet, that was not what Mark intended.



Imagine yourself in the second century hearing Mark's gospel conclude with, "Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid". Then, the dude reading the gospel rolled-up the scroll and said "Well, that's it!" You'd be like "What?!?!!" And you'd be like, "And.....?!?!?!?! What is next?" And this, this was Mark's point! Mark wanted you to ask "And...?!?!?!?! What next?!?!?!" and then answer the question for yourself!

Friends, one page 20 of Ana's book (that I could not keep myself from reading last night) it reads, "To help, go to page 21. To refuse, turn to page 31". And, so it is with us and our lives!



And...?!?!?! What next? And, so it is with our church? And...?!?!?! What next?!?!?!

'The LRPT met and discerned a new vision...And?!?! The Council met and decided to re-open the church after the pandemic...What next? The Finance Committee decided to revise the budget and proposed a new one that gave new hope...And?!?! What Next? Centre Church considered great dancing projects to take place for the congregation on the front lawn...And....?!?!?! What next? To participate, turn to page 28. To refuse, turn to page 51. The next chapter of our lives, the next chapter of our church's life, is not yet written and not yet chosen. We here, this morning, are left to choose it.



Friends, this Holy Week, we have engaged in what I referred to as a 'typological enactment' in Thursday's *eNews* ministerial devotion. From Maundy Thursday in the Upper Room, to the Cross of Calvary on Good Friday, to this

morning at the tomb, to our celebratory service at 10:00am, we re-live and to some extent emulate all the flaws and talents – of which there were many more flaws – of the disciples as they followed Jesus through his Passion and Resurrection. And Mark’s gospel has the story end here, here, here, here, early in the morning at the tomb.

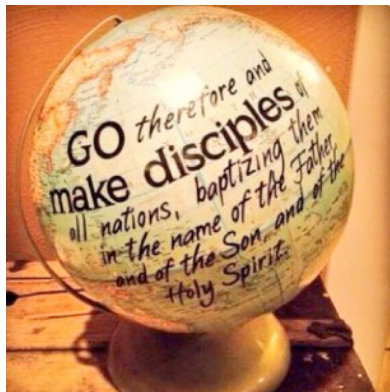


And...?!?!?!?! What comes next? Well, that is for us to discern. That is for us to choose. We will choose our own adventure at Centre Congregational Church in 2021. We will choose our own path as individual Christians after hearing this gospel story again. Perhaps, perhaps last year, we chose to refuse and we turned to page 51. Well, this year, as you re-hear the story, you can choose to help and turn to page 28. One of the beautiful aspects of the Choose your Own Adventure stories is that you get many 'do-overs'. You are allowed, what?, according to this book, 39 mulligans.

Hide it under a bushel? NO!!!



And, so it is this Easter. You get a chance to “hide it under a bushel, turn to page 51” or to “proclaim it to the ends of the Earth”, turn to page 28.



Just remember, the choices are not limitless. There does come a time when we have no more choices. There are only so many story paths and so many of them lead to selfishness and thus meaninglessness.



This Easter, I pray that you will hear Mark's gospel as it was intended to be heard. “Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled the tomb. They

said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid...”. And...?!?!?!?! What next?

Well, that is for you to decide. Choose your own adventure. Choose your own path.



I encourage you to join with me and the faithful leaders of Centre Church and let us choose a path and an adventure that leads us to lives of faith that foster service to the marginalized, the study of God’s Word, solidarity against injustice, and fellowship with one another and the world in LOVE.

This was the Word of God. And it was delivered to the People of God. And the people of God responded, “Amen!”