

Before there was the Chick Fil A Football Bowl game in the Georgia Dome, there was the Peach Bowl in Atlanta's Fulton County Stadium. The Chick Fil A Bowl has become this fairly nice bowl game played in the modern and comfortable Georgia Dome. The Peach Bowl at Atlanta's Fulton County Stadium? Not so much. But when I was 13 my family decided to attend the Peach Bowl as our Clemson Tigers played the Baylor Bears. On a cold and wet December day, we sat in the end zone seats and had a good view of the mascots of the two universities. Clemson's mascot then is the same as it is now. A Clemson student dressed in a Tiger costume. But the Baylor mascot at the time was a real bear on a leash.

Well before the game started, the two cheerleader squads ended up at our end of the field where the two mascots squared off against one another. A human dressed as a Tiger and a real bear. I don't know who the student was at the time. But I imagine that the thought of wrestling a real bear dressed as a wild animal was kind of nerve wracking for him. But he gave it a shot.

They wrestled for a little while and then the Tiger mascot was able to roll the bear over on his back. The Tiger mascot was very excited and stood up as if he had won. In his eyes, the match had ended. But the bear did not approach this match in the same way. He wanted to wrestle some more. And the student cheerleaders holding the leash were willing to let the match go on. The bear and the Tiger had different understandings of what the finish should look like.

Today we are going to be reading from Mark's version of the resurrection story. And like the bear and the Tiger in the 1979 Peach Bowl, there are different understandings of where the end of this story is to be found.

Read Mark 16: 1-8

You will see that the Bible notes that this is the shorter ending of Mark's gospel. No stories of Jesus appearing to anyone after the resurrection. The story ends with an empty tomb and scared women. And this is believed to be the way that the gospel of Mark originally ended.

Now remember, the gospels were not written down for a good 40 or so years after the death of Christ. The stories of Jesus' life were shared orally during this time because the early followers thought that Jesus would return in their lifetime. Because of that, these early followers did not see a need to write anything down. But sometime after Mark's written recording of his story, some other followers added to Mark's account.

They added to his account because Mark's original ending did not tell the whole story for them. They had heard stories of Jesus' appearances. And these later followers decided to add to Mark's story what they knew from their story.

Read Mark 16: 9-20

You may have caught in this added ending the part of handling of snakes. And with that in mind I do have a present in this box. (pull out fake snake). This added ending is where we have the biblical basis for the handling of snakes. And so if you really do want to claim to take the Bible literally at all times, then we Christians really should be able to handle snakes. But we are going to let that point lie at this point.

What I want to help us see is that early Christians felt that Mark's gospel did not tell the whole story. And they felt that they needed to add their story to Mark's story. They felt that they needed to add to Mark's story what they knew as the rest of the story. And the rest of the story is that Jesus' appears over and over to his followers in ways that they cannot understand. And that we need to continue to live out and tell the story of the resurrection of Jesus and add our story. We need to persevere in sharing the good news of the resurrection.

I want to share a story that was reported in the Chicago Sun-Times. A woman had left a shopping mall late one night, and as she was driving away, a man in a big truck behind her kept blowing his horn and flicking his lights. She moved from one lane to another, but he kept blowing his horn and flicking his lights. No matter where she moved on the highway, the truck driver stayed behind her and kept blowing his horn and flicking his lights.

A string of rapes had recently occurred in the Chicago area, so she was naturally scared. She called a girlfriend on her cell phone and they decided that she should drive to the nearest police station. She drove to the station and ran inside, only to discover that she had indeed been in danger all along.

The driver of the truck had seen a man get into the back seat of the woman's car. He crouched down where she couldn't see him. When the truck driver couldn't get to her in time to tell her, he followed her and wouldn't stop blowing his horn and flicking his lights.

At first this was an irritation, then it began to make the woman afraid, and her anxiety continued to rise. But he did not stop. He continued to blow his horn and flick his lights until he saw her out of danger.

We have a story to tell. A story of new life. And we share this story of new life even when obstacles get in the way.

Resurrection means to make things right. The resurrection calls us to work tirelessly to correct the wrongs and to bring new life where is death.

We do not need to be afraid. Christ is risen. Christ is risen indeed.

Let us not allow our own fear to keep us from sharing this story that Jesus is alive and continues to make himself known and that we have a story to tell. AMEN.

-“Hospitality,” March 2012, p. 8

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