

Mark 16.1-8

Jesus is... not in the tomb

Amington

Easter Sunday 21 April 2019

Mark: Seeing Jesus [48]

Anti-climax?

Eighty-five weeks ago many of us were sat here, watching and listening to a dramatisation of the first half of Mark's gospel. ¶ Here are some of my original notes for the series.

Over the last forty-eight sermons we've seen how Mark relentlessly asks two questions: ¶ who is Jesus, and ¶ what does it mean to follow him? We've learned about ¶ Markan sandwiches – laughed at Mark's wry sense of humour – and seen how he crafted his gospel carefully, to keep the focus on Jesus. But the end of his gospel is something of an anti-climax...

¶ Most modern Bibles have something like this after verse 8: **The most reliable early manuscripts and other ancient witnesses do not have Mark 16.9-20** (NIV 1984).

Which means Mark ended his gospel with verse 8 §:

Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

Mark 16.8 (NIV)

No breakfast with Jesus by the beach. No miraculous catch of fish. No appearance in a locked room. No Great Commission.

Are we missing a page? Did Mark *die* before he could finish? Did he *mean* to end it so abruptly?

What we have here is one of these §. (That's a red herring, by the way.) Let's not be distracted by what Mark *doesn't* say, and instead focus on what he *does* say – because, after all, Mark may have written the words, but the author is the Holy Spirit.

The Women (1-4)

What day does an Easter egg hate the most?

Good Fry-day.

§ By the time Jesus' followers were able to get his body down from the cross, it was late on Friday, the day before the Sabbath (15.42), which meant they didn't have time to anoint his body for burial.

On the Sabbath they did no work – so as soon as evening fell and the Sabbath ended, they went out to the shops to buy the necessary spices (1) and (presumably) spent the evening preparing them.

Then, **very early on the first day of the week** (i.e. Sunday), **just after sunrise**, the women got up, gathered their spices together, and ¶ headed off to the tomb (2).

They were so well prepared... but they forgot one crucial element: as they reached the garden the penny dropped... **‘Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?’** (3).

Now we don’t know exactly how big the stone was, but Mark describes it as *megas* (4) – the same word he uses to describe the furious storm (*seismos megas*) that terrified the disciples in chapter 4. Only here he adds *another* word: *exceedingly*. This wasn’t simply a *massive* stone, it was an *exceedingly* massive stone.

So: who moved it? It’s a great question, ¶ but it’s another one of these. Mark doesn’t tell us – why? Well it’s not an important detail – Mark is a man of few words after all – maybe we don’t need to know. Remember: we are focusing on what Mark *does* say, not what he *doesn’t* say.

The Young Man (5-6)

What do you get if you cross a hen with a dog?

Pooched eggs.

Back to the women... §

As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.

Mark 16.5 (NIV)

Was he an angel? Probably... § ... Mark doesn't tell us, we don't need to know – and he doesn't want us to focus on the wrong thing... 'Oooh, an angel!' It's not important who *is* there, what's important is who *isn't* there. § The young man tells them:

'Don't be alarmed. You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. § He has risen! § He is not here. § See the place where they laid him.

Mark 16.6 (NIV)

Let's unpack that a little bit. Jesus' *body* was *gone*. Through the words of the young man, Mark makes that point three times: **'He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him'** (6).

Why is this so important?

Jesus told a lot of parables. He used picture-language to illustrate his teachings. The farmer who sowed his seed so badly, scattering expensive seeds on a path – he wasn't *real*, he was a story. The shepherd who foolishly abandoned ninety-nine sheep to look for one that was lost – he wasn't *real*, he was a story. The prodigal son who abandoned his family – he wasn't *real*, he was a story.

Sometimes people treat the resurrection of Jesus like that, too – a story that has a true *message*, but didn't *actually* happen.

You might be able to craft an inspirational message out of that, but it wouldn't be good news. If Jesus' resurrection did *not* involve his body, then the best we can hope for is an *escape* from this world.

I don't know about you, but I rather *like* this world. I love the majesty of mountains, the taste of delicious food, the feel of rain on my face, the breath-taking power of a waterfall, the beautiful colours of a sunset, the smell of fresh coffee – and so much more.

God made the world, he made it *very* good. He made us, not as souls trapped in a body, but as *whole* people, made up of soul *and* body. We are physical, material beings... in a material world (to misquote Madonna).

And that is why the resurrection is good news.

The angel said, ¶ **'He is not here'** (6). Jesus' body was gone – which means the life God offers is not an escape but a transformation. It means the life God offers doesn't reject the physical material stuff of this world, but takes it all – good *and* bad – and transforms it, like a ¶ butterfly emerging from the caterpillar's chrysalis.

The bodily resurrection of Jesus is not a story or a metaphor but a real, concrete event which happened on *that* day in *that* place – every bit as much as our ¶ wedding was a real event on *that* day (1 August 2015) and in *that* place (Studley Parish Church); it is not simply a metaphor of our love for each other!

This is *real* and it is *good news*: this stuff – matter – *matters* to God.

Faith or Fear (7-8)

A man wanted an Easter pet for his daughter. He looked at a baby chick and a baby duck. They were both very cute, but he decided to buy the baby chick. Do you know why?

The baby chick was a little cheeper!

Mark has been building up to *this* moment – the moment of truth, the vindication of everything Jesus had been doing and teaching – and then he ends like this ¶:

Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

Mark 16.8 (NIV)

Fear is something many of us are familiar with: fear of the future, fear of change, fear of the unknown, fear of losing our loved ones, or our health, fear of death... the list goes on.

Fear is a bit of a theme in Mark's gospel – possibly preparing us for this moment...? – the disciples were afraid in the storm, , the chief priests were afraid of the crowds, Pilate was afraid of the chief priests, Peter was afraid in the courtyard of the high priest, and now the women were left **trembling, bewildered** and **afraid**.

What's going on?

The clue lies in verse 7. The angel told the women **∫**:

[The young man said,] 'Go, tell [Jesus'] disciples and Peter, "He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you." '

Mark 16.7 (NIV)

As much as *fear* is a theme in Mark, so is *faith*. In fact, he presents them to us as a choice: we can choose to give in to fear, or we can choose to have faith.

So what is faith, for Mark?

I'd like to answer that question with another question: what – or rather *who* – is missing from Mark 16? Jesus!

Forget the other gospels for a minute – what do the disciples have to do to see Jesus? **Go** – where? To **Galilee**, where it all began, but more importantly – to their home.

And how do they know they'll see him **there**? Because that's what he **told** them.

The empty tomb strongly suggests Jesus rose from the dead, but the proof of his resurrection comes through faith – which is...?

↳ trusting and obeying Jesus.

The *proof* comes through faith: they want to see Jesus, but *first* they must **go** to **Galilee**, to discover he is **there**. The proof comes *after* the faith; which means if they choose fear instead of faith, if they don't *first go*, they will not find Jesus.

And – thankfully for us – they *did* go, and they *did* find him.

For Mark then, faith is *active*, it is a *journey*. That means it is not something you have by virtue of being English, or baptised a long time ago, or both.

Jesus' resurrection is not a lovely idea or a powerful parable, it is a world-shattering, creation-transforming, life-changing *event* – which demands a response. And the response Mark wants us to make is the response of faith...

Faith is... a daily exercise of walking to where the Lord has gone, believing him to be there and finding him to be so. It is not a procession of cast-iron certainties, but an experience of trust in him who lived, and died, and rose to be with them forever. And they will find him at home.

English, Mark (BST), 242

Faith is not a form to fill in or a document to sign: faith is walking, walking not alone but with the risen Jesus, with our Christian brothers and sisters, believing Jesus to be there with us along the journey – **and finding him to be so**. It is not complicated, but neither is it easy – however, *this is the way God made you to live*.

Easter is all about life.

What sort of life do *you* want to live?