

JOURNEYING THROUGH HOLY WEEK TO EASTER WITH MARK'S GOSPEL

EASTER SUNDAY 04 April 2021

Focus your attention on God and become aware again of God's presence with you, and of joining with other worshippers (as in the Introduction to this series).

Thank God for bringing you safely to this day. Ask God to inspire you.

Then read these passages, paying attention to them as you do. What catches your imagination? What puzzles you? How do they make you feel?

Mark 16:1-8 (NRSV)

[¹When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him.]

²And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. ³They had been saying to one another, 'Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?' ⁴When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. ⁵As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. ⁶But he said to them, 'Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. ⁷But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.' ⁸So 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.

Reflection

So it is the women who go to the tomb early on the third day. They are intending to do what there had been no time to do on the first day, the day of Jesus's execution. They are going to anoint his body with spices as a last tender act of caring for it and preparing it for the tomb. Whereas the sun's light had failed in the middle of the day as life had drained out of him, now the sun has just risen. They knew that a stone had been rolled over the entrance to the tomb in order to seal it temporarily, and they are worrying about how they will manage to find someone who is able to roll it back again so they can go in.

Yet when they get to the tomb, they discover that the stone has already been rolled back. Alarming, frighteningly, inside they find not Jesus's body but someone who looks like an angel, who has a message for them. He knows that they have come looking for the body of Jesus who has been crucified. In other words, they believe that Jesus is dead. But the message is that he is no longer dead. He has not revived, or been resuscitated, or risen by himself. He has been raised by God!

How would you react if you were there? If they could get their minds around what was being said at all, they might well have wanted to know where Jesus was and when they could see him. The next shock is that the angel tells them that he has gone back to Galilee, and that they will have to go there to see him. Then he tells them that they must go and give this message to the male disciples as well.

Will they? Did they? This is how the original version of Mark's gospel seems to have ended, on a cliff-hanger. Jesus does not appear in his risen form at the end of Mark's story. There is simply a

proclamation that he has been raised to new life. So far as the men amongst his followers are concerned, that is all they get – and they get it not directly from the angel but second hand from the women!

If you stop and think about it, that is exactly the situation that we are in some two thousand years later. We have an Easter proclamation that Christ has been raised, which comes to us second-hand in the pages of the New Testament and from his followers over the centuries.

Can you trust and believe it? Could those early male disciples? One of the problems facing them was that the witnesses who were proclaiming the message to them were women. In their society women were not to be trusted and were not in general expected or allowed to give testimony in court. But whereas the male disciples had committed themselves to following Jesus and then between them failed, deserted, denied and betrayed them, the women have promised nothing and yet been with him throughout, not least as he died on the cross and now here at the tomb.

So it is the women who are asked to pass the message on. Not surprisingly, at first they are too afraid to do it. Would the others believe them? Would the men do as they had been asked and go back to Galilee? Why Galilee? If you think back over the whole story that Mark has told, Galilee is the place where Jesus had called his disciples and trained them to take part in his mission of announcing the kingdom of God and releasing people from what oppresses them. If they go and do what he had trained them to do, they will be continuing his mission. The incredible message is that they are not to hang around waiting for him to appear to them before they do anything. They are not to wait for intellectual or spiritual certainty. It is in getting on with their mission that they will meet the risen Lord, because it is his mission and he is still active in it.

Will they do it? Will we? Those women must eventually have found the courage to pass on the message. The fact that Mark's gospel exists and the church still carries on its mission two thousand years later bears witness to that.

Will we find the courage to do the same: to speak and to go?

*1. All you that seek the Lord who died,
your God for sinners crucified,
now, let all your grief be o'er!
Believe, and you shall weep no more.*

*2. The Lord of life is risen indeed,
to death delivered in your stead;
his rise proclaims your sins forgiven,
and shows the living way to heaven.*

*3. Haste then, you souls that first believe,
who dare the gospel word receive,
your faith with joyful hearts confess,
be bold, be Jesus' witnesses.*

*4. Go tell the followers of your Lord
their Jesus is to life restored;
he lives to quicken humankind;
he lives that all his life may find.*

Charles Wesley, StF 294

Methodist Worship Book p.161

Prayer

Lord of all life and power,
who through the mighty resurrection of your Son
overcame the old order of sin and death to make all things new in him:
grant that we, being dead to sin and alive to you in Jesus Christ,
may reign with him in glory;
to whom with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit
Be praise and honour, glory and might, now and in all eternity. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer