

The Day of Resurrection, April 5, 2015 St. Augustine's in the Woods, Freeland WA
Nigel Taber-Hamilton. Mark 16: 1-8

Why are you here today? I know that sounds like an impertinent question, but it's an important one. Some of you might have been dragged here by a relative. Others because you're curious. Others, because you have a sense of duty or a duty to fulfil. Others, because you couldn't imagine being anywhere else. I'll bet there's a mixture of these in play today, too.

Today proclaims Jesus' resurrection. If it only proclaims Jesus' resurrection then I'd say it's pretty much a waste of time for the rest of us!

Christians down the ages have proclaimed this day also to be a celebration of our own resurrections – both now, in the transformative experience that comes from a community of individuals drawn together by a common faith and commitment to God, and in the future, at some undetermined time.

And yet!

And yet today's gospel provides a clouded view of what happened 2,000 years ago! Clouded enough that though today's gospel passage is the original ending of Mark's Gospel it was so unsatisfactory that at least two other endings were added soon after it appeared by other hands which sought to clarify what Jesus' resurrection was really about.

Based on the original ending, there's not much we can say about what our will be like - such statements require an act of faith and a revelation from God to know the definitive answer! The earliest New Testament writings – by St. Paul – speak in the language of metaphor and mystery; Paul said. “We will not all die, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.” (1 Cor 15:51b-52)

I do believe that we all live on in God beyond our physical death, that all that we have been remains forever alive in God, that we – that I – have the possibility for new experiences in continuity with those that have constituted my life – our lives – in this world. I think that's what Paul was trying to describe when he talked about the way he experienced the risen Christ.

That's not, however, what Mark's Gospel is concerned with! At least, not on this day and in the text we've had laid before us. Yes, it's about resurrection – Jesus' resurrection, and how Jesus' resurrection is – in this life – relevant for us.

In many ways, Mark's gospel is the strangest of the four when it comes to the resurrection of Jesus. The emphasis seems to be on Jesus not being present in the tomb. Perhaps it's because the women were coming to treat him as someone dead, as a dead body requiring being bound up – that would certainly make him safely and securely unable to have any impact on the living!!

The “young man dressed in a white robe” – obviously to be understood as an angelic messenger – tells the tale, delivering the good tidings of Easter morning like an administrative assistant

explaining why you can't have a quick word with the boss: "You're looking for Jesus? Sorry, you just missed him."

Jesus is not here! There's some irony to this! Does it mean that we – as we gather here today – have also "Just missed Jesus?"

Why had the women just missed him? Well, the messenger says that it's because there's pressing work to be getting on with – places to go, people to be saved, the world to be restored. No rest for the savior!

And no rest for us, this story is saying – the Resurrected One has no intention of giving us time to sit around pondering whether we believe in this sort of thing or not.

Almost the opposite, in fact. Notice that Peter – the one who denied Jesus in his life, and doubted in his resurrection – Peter is the only disciple singled out by name to be told the message. Perhaps that's the biggest "Told You So" in human history!

But the message isn't a simple, "He has risen." It's not only about Jesus – after all, what next for the bystanders, the women, if the only message is "I was here, but now I've gone, goodbye"?!! No, the message is "time to get up and get going, we have work to do." WE have work to do.

"To do what?" you might ask. The "where" tells the tale of the "what".

Jerusalem was the religious capital of Judaism, the place all Jews – including Jesus and his disciples – came to engage in ritual worship, to celebrate the great festivals of the faith, to "praise God in his holy temple." Jerusalem was quintessential religion, pure and simple.

But the region called "The Galilee," any biblical archaeologist will tell you, was the opposite of Jerusalem. It contained many Jewish settlements, but also people from all over this part of the Empire who were not Jewish, including at least two of the large Greek settlements that formed a part of the "Decapolis."

And The Galilee was where Jesus was from, where he exercised a "Lake Ministry" around that thing we call a "sea;" where he first proclaimed the "Good News," where he taught, healed, and fed people; where he became a "byword among them."

The women who came to the tomb would have known the Galilee well – they were with Jesus back then, in that time that must have seemed eons ago, but was actually only a few weeks back; the Messenger's words must have meant a great deal more to them than we realize today.

What, then, would it mean for the disciples – and for us – to try and catch up with Jesus in Galilee? Is it back to the good old days with everything just as it was, only better?

Well, no! In the first half of his gospel, Mark tells a parallel story of Jesus' great acts of power through compassion and love, and the male disciples' failure to understand or emulate him. They

keep getting it so wrong that he keeps telling them to keep quiet about who he is – he doesn't want anyone spreading news about him, because they don't yet have the full picture. His full identity has not yet been disclosed.

The second half of Mark's story takes place in Jerusalem – it's the revealing of that full identity, the one that involves death and an empty tomb. Only now, with both parts in plain view, is the true picture revealed. Only now, with the Crucified One Who Has Been Raised, can we fully comprehend, Mark is saying to us.

But how can we resolve the tensions between the two halves? Between the “fearless, urgent whirlwind of divine power who ties up the satanic strong man in order to plunder his house (Mark 3:27) on the one hand, and the passive, silent victim of arrest, abuse, mockery, false accusation, and execution (chapters 14–15) on the other? Mark doesn't even try – but he does insist on holding both of these views of Jesus both before our wondering eyes.

That, I think, is part of the message – perhaps we can't resolve the tension; perhaps we shouldn't even try.

But one thing is clear; the place of ministry with Jesus – the place to see Jesus – is no longer exclusively in the religious setting but in the highways and byways of life; among, not apart from. He has gone there ahead of us, with perhaps a distant glance over his shoulder to see if we're still following him into the heart of life.

So today – while a great moment of celebration – isn't a terminal moment. I'm reminded of the collect prayer for Palm Sunday: “when all the shouting dies down,” when all the dry palm branches have been swept away, when all the Easter eggs have been found, and all the candy has been eaten, will we still be with you, Jesus?”

Whatever he's up to out there, it's probably not what you might first suspect! We would need to know the whole story to know where to look for him, and what we know – only what we know – is that he's out there ahead of us at the far distance, beckoning. That will have to be enough to go on as our search for the first part of true resurrection living begins.

