**Sermon Easter Sunday Mark 16:1-8 - 31/3/24**

**Sermon Video link:** [**https://youtu.be/hnGufclCSvg**](https://youtu.be/hnGufclCSvg)

It is Sunday morning just after sunrise. Three women Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome are on their way to the tomb with spices to anoint the dead corpse of their beloved Rabbi, Jesus. They find the large stone at the tomb’s entrance rolled away and go inside.

There is a young man sitting on the right side dressed in white. He appears to be a messenger from God. The word for messenger in Greek is angelos. Our English translations usually translate this as angel rather than messenger. This messenger greets the women with a greeting typical of angels, “Don’t be afraid.” It was this greeting that the angel gave Zechariah in the temple when he announced to him that his wife Elizabeth would have a son and he was to name him John. It was the same greeting the angel Gabriel gave to Mary when he announced she would have a son, she was to name Jesus, “Mary, don’t be afraid.” It was the greeting the shepherds received from the angel announcing the birth of Jesus, “Do not be afraid.”

This messenger tells the three women something very unexpected, that Jesus is risen and that he is not there. Then he tells them to tell the disciples and Peter that Jesus has gone ahead to Galilee and they can go and see him there.

The women end up trembling and bewildered. The word translated as bewildered is the way you feel when you have been terrified by something unexpected that seems to defy explanation. Your brain is confused, and it is in survival mode. In a fog, you can’t think about anything but running away as fast as you can. This is not a pleasant experience. They are so full of fear they can’t speak to anyone about what has just happened.

There ends the gospel.

What do you mean, there ends the Gospel? Scholars tell us that the earliest manuscripts of the Gospel according to Mark end at 16:8, with the women running away and not telling anyone about their terrifying experience. This leaves us with too many questions.

What did the messenger mean when he said, “He is risen?” After all we have never seen anyone rise from the dead. Surely the messenger didn’t mean Jesus is physically alive did he. That is impossible, isn’t it? If that were true, then the very nature of reality would be different wouldn’t it. Death would no longer be the end, because if Jesus could rise then God could raise us as well.

We would need proof to believe such a thing, wouldn’t we? We would want to have eyewitnesses that saw him. If there are witnesses, then we would want to know if he was merely a ghost, an apparition or an actual flesh and blood living human being.

Mark’s original ending seems be encouraging the reader to do further investigation.

Mark probably wrote his account of the gospel somewhere between 20 and 37 or so years after the resurrection of Jesus. Many of the eyewitnesses to the resurrection were very likely to still be alive. Some of the apostles were most likely still alive and a good number of the 500 eyewitnesses Paul mentions were probably still alive.

Some estimates have less than 1 or 2 thousand Christians in the whole Christian church at the time Mark wrote. We know well in the Lutheran church in Australia how closely connected people are. In such a small church most people would know someone who knew someone that witnessed Jesus’ resurrection. Mark seems to be encouraging people to investigate what the living eyewitness saw and experienced. Or perhaps some of the congregations he was writing to, had members who were eyewitnesses and there was no need to present any further evidence of the resurrection.

You could imagine the conversations in the various congregations after reading Marks account aloud during worship. One member talks about how she was amazed when Mary told her about meeting Jesus in the garden and thought he was the gardener. Another person recalls one the apostles talking about Jesus appearing in a locked room, and how Thomas didn’t believe Jesus was alive until he touched the wounds on his hands and side. Another remembers an apostle telling him how Jesus ate fish and cooked a barbeque for a group of them on the shores of Lake Galilee. You could imagine the ending of Marks account stimulating long conversations about firsthand resurrection experiences of Jesus.

Perhaps there is an even more important question people may ask the eyewitnesses. What was this risen Jesus like? Was he changed by his experiences on Good Friday Was he angry with his disciples for abandoning him. Was he disappointed that they were so slow in working out what his life, death and resurrection was all about. Did he give the disciples a good serve of his anger and disappointment.

Someone might remember what he said on the cross before he died? “Father forgive them.” Another might talk with great emotion and tears in his eyes about the words Jesus said when he appeared in that locked room “Peace be with you!” Wow wouldn’t that have been great. Knowing that Jesus had forgiven his disciples even though they had denied and abandoned him on Good Friday.

As the members of the congregations Mark wrote to, recalled the experiences of the eyewitnesses in their congregations or members accounts of what an eye witness had told them, the impact of the resurrection would once again be impressed on them. They would remember again that the risen Jesus forgave his disciples, and continues to offer forgiveness to all people. They would remember again that nothing, not even death on a cross, will stop God the Father from loving humanity and offering forgiveness, life, and salvation to all.

Years later though, with the witnesses all dead, people began to realise the importance of recording the evidence, and someone, maybe someone who knew Mark, wrote some extra verses. Matthew, Luke, John, and Paul also recorded evidence that Jesus physically rose from the dead.

Thanks to those witnesses we can now say with confidence that he is risen. God raised Jesus therefore God can and will raise us. Therefore, on this Easter and every Sunday we can remember Paul’s quote from Isaiah and Hosea,

“’Death has been swallowed up in victory.’

‘Where, O death, is your victory?
    Where, O death, is your sting?’

‘thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.’” (12 Cor 15:54-57, NIV).

**Amen**

Pastor Rolf Lungwitz