

Reflection on Easter Sunday

David Fotheringham,
April 2020

Read: Mark 16:1-8

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+16%3A1-8&version=NRSV>

I wasn't there. I didn't witness it. So I speculate: Early this morning, when it was still rather dark, three women went to the church. They had been saying to one another, "who will open the door, for the lock is firm?" When they looked up, the car park was open. They were greeted by a sign, in white paper, on the right of the door; and they were alarmed. But the sign said to them: "Do not be alarmed! You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, and the annual dawn service. He is not here! – see, the church is empty. But go, for he is going ahead of you, and the world will not be quite the same." So they went out and fled, for terror and amazement seized them; they said nothing to anyone, but went home, and washed their hands, as they prepared to wait for what was next.

Of course, the story does not end there. Our story does not end there. The gospel of Mark does not end there, with the women running scared from the angel and the empty tomb. We don't have any more of the original writing of Mark's gospel – it seems to end abruptly in verse 8 – but whether there was originally more written or not, this was always only ever a beginning.

You might remember me saying back around Christmas-time that Mark called this "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God". It is only the beginning, because the story continues in the world and in our lives.

The passage that we hear today is very much about new beginning, and runs some interesting parallels.

The three women who went to the tomb are like our frontline health workers. They turn up, even when they are going to be confronted by physically challenging situations, smells and sights and wounded flesh; emotionally challenging; in a situation where there is an element of fear - for the women in the gospel, because attending to a body like Jesus' might attract more trouble to themselves.

They turn up, even if they also aren't perfect; even if they didn't comprehend what Jesus had been saying all along. We can be grateful for them turning up.

But they did not go expecting to be witnesses of the resurrection. They were going to do what needed to be done, because to not do so would have torn them up inside; even if going would also tear them up inside. So they went to do what needed to be done. Jesus'

body had not been given its proper burial treatment - the enforced stoppage of the Sabbath meant that the normal funeral processes had to be delayed.

Jesus had died. Though the women grieved, they knew what had to be done for the burial practices of the time. If nothing else, it would provide some closure. An end to this crazy adventure. Following Jesus was full of love, for sure, but, let's face it: his call can be challenging at times. He brings out the best in us, but the cost of living full and free is letting go of our self-obsession and following Jesus' lead in generosity, compassion and faith. So perhaps, for the women going to the tomb, the closure that they were expecting would have a hint of relief that they were going back to normal life again, even if sadly.

And then this angel shows up, tells them not to be alarmed, and points out that Jesus is risen and is going ahead of them as he said he would.

The joy will come in time. There's lots of joy about this. Jesus' resurrection is the defeat of death, the assurance of life, the ultimate promise of hope.

But the women's first reaction, to which we might now relate, is confusion and uncertainty. They thought they might go back to their old, normal lives, but now the world looks different. Only a month or so ago we thought we'd go on with our old, normal lives, but now the world looks different. We are going to find ourselves with the economic order tossed about, different groups of people, not just here but the more around the world facing very strained economic conditions, and many people with very few choices or means.

Just as for those women at the empty tomb, we find that Jesus goes ahead of us. Even if at this moment we stay inside, amazed that the church is empty, waiting for what happens next, this is not where the story ends. Just like the women who ran home from the tomb - this is not where the story ends.

Because he goes ahead of us. He has always led the way in bringing good news to the poor, freedom for the oppressed, and recovery of sight for the blind. And he always calls his disciples to follow. In his resurrection life he goes before us; and when the time is right for us to act with generosity, compassion and faith, he will be present with us to graciously bring out the best in us, gifting us with his spirit, to lead us in fullness of life.

Amen.