

**High St Uniting Church Frankston**  
**Mark 16: 1 – 8**

**What do we do?**



The original ending of Mark's Gospel - verse 8 - "And they ran away in terror and amazement and said nothing to anyone."

Hardly the stuff of joyous worship or evangelism. Where's the good news in "They ran away scared"? It can't be taken literally, if they ran away and said nothing, we wouldn't have an account of what the angel said. Indeed, we wouldn't have a Gospel. It's a dramatic ending, with Mark capturing one of the natural reactions to seeing something so unexpected and confronting. An empty tomb when they expected to deal with the body of Jesus. An

angel when they were concerned about who would move the heavy stone. They were naturally gripped with fear, amazement, and terror. It's a powerful, dramatic ending that so clearly undermines the conspiracy theories of the disciples stealing the body, or the women going to the wrong tomb. But it obviously met with some resistance in the Early Church because we have two alternate endings that have been added in various ways in ancient manuscripts. Endings that align Mark with the other Gospels and give us Jesus' resurrection appearances. An empty tomb is one thing, but stories of seeing the risen Jesus are what we really need to call this resurrection. But, still, we have Mark's original story with its mysterious ending. What do we do with 'they ran away and said nothing to anyone'?

The stark, original ending was one that fitted what we assume to be the original purpose of Mark's little book, which was passing on the stories of Jesus to the next generation. Indeed, it is surmised that what we have as a Gospel was a training manual for new disciples. They worked their way through the book, always holding the question of Jesus identity. The oldest copies don't have the claim that Jesus is the Son of God in the opening verse, so 'Who is Jesus Christ?' is the question. It builds to the middle of the book and the Transfiguration and then gets deeper as the story moves to the cross. You can imagine the candidates for baptism at Easter coming to the end of the book as the community joins to celebrate the Crucified and Risen Lord Jesus Christ. They don't need a story of the resurrected Jesus; they are celebrating in a community of the resurrection! Their question of 'Who is Jesus?' receives an answer in their baptism and the joyous worship around them.

As the church grew and matured, and the discipleship training manual from Mark's community got shared wider, and gained the title of Gospel, it couldn't be assumed that readers would get to the end of the book at Easter and join in the celebration of the resurrection, people started to see another way to find Jesus, the resurrected Son, in Mark's stark ending. Look closer at this final story in Mark. The angel – the young man dressed in a white robe - says, "He is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him." At the arrest of Jesus, a young man was following and, when the guards caught hold of him, his linen cloth fell off and he ran away naked. Tradition says that young man was Mark. Now, here is a young man dressed in white – the symbol of baptism – telling the women to go to Galilee. Is this Mark telling the reader to go back to the start of the story? Go to Galilee, go back to the start of the book, 'In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee', and read again the story of Jesus with the empty tomb as the context. Now, 'Who is Jesus?'

For us, now, what do we make of this story, mysterious ending for the story of Jesus? A modern interpretation of Mark's ending is that he is leaving the meeting with Jesus up to the reader. Each of us is left with the question of the empty tomb. "You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is not here; he has been raised." What do we do with this story? Do we have the faith to see an empty tomb and say, He is Risen? Can we move beyond the amazement and alarm of the women and sing in praise rather than remain silent in fear? Do we have the faith to go back to the story of Jesus and encounter him there? Do we have the faith to move beyond witnesses and written accounts to the inferred end, and see, and proclaim, our Crucified, Risen Lord?

Maybe it's a combination of all those interpretations. Here we are, in a worshiping community, celebrating the day of resurrection. Do we need a story of the appearance of the resurrected Jesus? Or are we, in our joyous worship, witnesses enough? Each in our own way, we have met the risen Jesus and now join to celebrate, to commemorate, and to worship. Unlike the women, we don't run away scared, not even scared that people won't believe us, we see the empty tomb, hear the instruction to go and meet Jesus, and we rejoice! Since the last Easter, we have gone back to the start, we have read the stories of Jesus in the light of the empty tomb, and here we are to worship.

What do we do with this stark, mysterious ending to what is supposed to be Good News? We rejoice that this very human story points us to the divine story of life beyond life and grace beyond failure. This is Good News. Good News that brings us, in faith, to say, Christ is Risen.