

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

How joyfully we say these words on this Easter morning but how different it was for Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Salome on that first Easter morning when they brought spices to the tomb so that they could anoint the body of their master who had been crucified just two days before.

They had loved this man Jesus, this man who had lived and breathed obedience to God, this man who walked through ancient Palestine “proclaiming the good news of God and saying “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news.” He had proven his words through miraculous deeds: healing the sick, giving sight to the blind, casting out demons, feeding the multitudes, walking on water, quelling the storm, and giving hope to so many. Now he was dead, shamefully dead and all their hopes with him. The disciples were scattered, fearful of receiving the same fate as their master; all that remained was to anoint the body, to treat it with the respect that it had not received in life.

They had forgotten or did not believe Jesus when he had said that he would be “rejected by the elders, chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.”

They also seem to have forgotten that Jesus had already been anointed by an unnamed woman in the house of Simon the Leper. When his disciples had tried to chase her away Jesus had said “Let her alone...She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial.”

Jesus had told them time and again what was going to happen. He had told them that this life in the kingdom of God would require them to embrace the cross but they had not believed him. It is the cross that brings pain and sometimes death and it also brings transformation.

The women are so focused on their grief that they believe everything is lost and they are just wondering how to roll back the stone over Jesus’ tomb.

Then the women are astonished when they saw that the stone been rolled back and that the tomb is occupied by a young man dressed in white.

Usually folks dressed in white only show up in scripture when they are angels of the Lord bringing some kind of important news. That should have given the women a clue. On the other hand I don’t know how I would react if suddenly someone were to turn up dressed in white robes who was trying to tell me something of significance, something that was so outside of my expectations of life as I knew it. The usual reaction to such manifestations is awe and a little fear – which is a pretty healthy reaction.

The angel tells them some amazing news “He is raised; he is not here.”
“He is raised; he is not here.”

The angel told them but what did they hear – that Jesus was a zombie? They might have remembered that Jesus had brought Jairus’ daughter back to life but they had seen Jesus die. They had seen his body nailed to the cross that same body covered with wounds from its abuse

at the hands of the soldiers. If Jesus were dead how could he raise himself? Moreover they did not know what it meant to be raised. It's not like Jesus had ever said what being raised would be like. Almost 2,000 years later we don't really know either except that being brought back to life from the dead is different from being raised or resurrected. In the case of the former we are just brought back to life more or less as we were, in the latter it is to a transformed state in a transformed world.

The women hadn't processed the implications of those words when the angel adds that they should go and tell the disciples and Peter that Jesus would meet them in Galilee. It was too much, too fast, and way beyond comprehension.

“So 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.”

How many of you noticed that I didn't read the last two lines of the gospel as printed in your bulletin? No, I didn't miss them I left them out on purpose because the most authentic versions of Mark end with the words “for they were afraid.”

It's a funny way to end “the Good news of Jesus Christ the Son of God, isn't it – as if that were the end of the story?

Because we know that's not the end of the story. But it does show that the women were no different than the disciples who ran away during Jesus crucifixion or Peter when he denied his relationship with Jesus 3 times. They also didn't believe.

Some scholars think Mark didn't end his gospel this way and that the real ending was lost. Others think that Mark was trying to tell his community of listeners who were being persecuted not to be afraid to share the good news, and still others that it is a literary device meant to draw the reader into the story, that today we who hear the gospel are responsible for spreading the word.

While it's a nice unresolvable mystery the words don't really matter and those next two lines that follow which comprise what is known as the *Shorter Ending of Mark* tell us all we need to know. “And all that had been commanded them they told briefly to those around Peter and afterward Jesus himself sent out through them, from east to west, the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation. “

These lines were probably appended by a helpful scribe, someone trying to reconcile Mark's gospel with the endings of the gospels of Matthew and Luke and John.

But it doesn't really matter because eventually somebody would have had to say something – you know what it's like when you're in shock, you can't quite describe what has happened until sometime later – otherwise we wouldn't be here today, or any other Sunday celebrating Jesus' resurrection. Somebody had to say something and Jesus did meet up with the disciples and in those meetings Christ proved that he had done what he said he was going to do. He had fulfilled his mission and so he was able to convince his disciples that it was up to them to spread the word, the good news that would transform the world. And so they did. This ragged little band of disciples, sometime cowards, sometimes weak in faith, now fired by the truth of what they experienced in Christ Jesus would find the strength to preach the gospel to

the ends of the known world. They would share the good news of God in Christ, the very same news that we celebrate today, the news that bring God's grace into our lives.

If this were not so we wouldn't be proclaiming with confidence the words in our Apostle's Creed "On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead." We wouldn't have 2,000 years of history in which people's lives have been transformed in Christ, we wouldn't turn to him for comfort or for strength or for hope when our lives are difficult, we wouldn't hope that after death we would be united again with those we love, and we wouldn't continue to baptize as we will/have baptize(d) Anthony Bennett in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, welcoming those who are baptized into the fellowship of all the saints.

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