

1 Corinthians 15: 1- 8 MARK 16:1-8

“Fear and shock and the plot of Easter”

Have you ever watched one of those Indiana Jones sort of action thriller movies where the hero seems to always be in some terrible situation. In front of him (it's always a him!) there is a life threatening danger - at the very least - something awful, unimaginably horrifying, a pit of ten thousand snakes, a precipice with no escape, an enormous avalanche, 10,000 pointed knives, - and the music builds, and you know that there is no escape, the bridge behind has been burnt, something even worse is behind than what is in front and the only way to go is on in blind hope! There is no way back, it's too late to turn around now! And then, we know how the story goes, somehow a new way opens and the hero is saved! **This is not what Easter is like!**

For the disciples, after Easter, it was too late to go back,  
**the end had come.**

The climax of the action had passed and Jesus the presumed hero, .... **had already died.**

The miraculous, last minute thriller escape,.. had not eventuated.

No legion of angels had appeared.  
No Elijah defeating the false prophets.  
No winged heavenly chariot.  
No thundering intervention from above.  
And what made it worse was the fact that Jesus friends had deserted him. They all knew that the plot had **gone wrong, terribly, unimaginably wrong!**

The disciples drew the same conclusion as we might today. Death was real. And they

saw a lot more of it publicly displayed than we do. Those people had eyes and ears, and brains with which to reason. They did not meet the dead in their city squares, or find them sitting in a favourite chair, or worshipping at the temple. They knew - the dead were dead.

When Jesus was killed he was gone forever! Those who entombed him knew they were dealing with rigor mortis. They did not expect to hear his voice; this Galilean teacher, he was silenced forever.

And so, Sunday morning comes and the women are up early, they have been to 7/11, done the shopping for the burial spices and they arrive at the grave site just after it is light.

I wonder how you and I would arrive for a job like this? Where would your feelings be as you arrived to prepare for the proper burial of a body of a close friend and beloved leader after such tragic events? We know they wondered how they could do their intended job with such a large stone sealing the grave.

**The women arrive to a shock.** The grave is already open!

A young man dressed in white sits in the tomb.

Now they knew, and we know about last minute escapes,  
but that was not the way it was here.

More particularly they, and we know about the tragic finality of death. There are two certainties in life, the saying goes.

And while we might seek to avoid taxes, and while they may go up and down, death is definitely the more certain of the two.

Death leaves that pit of emptiness in the stomachs of those left, death is a wound that opens other old wounds, that triggers guilt, and makes us question, “Why? what if? And, if only?”

The women came to the tomb with the smell of death in the air, but the open grave holds a man in white, who says to them **“don’t be afraid, he has been raised”** and he gives them Jesus forwarding address, **“he is going ahead of you to Galilee”** and he gives the order to **“go and tell the other disciples.”**

In an interesting footnote here - did you notice the angel calls the women “disciples” - on par with the others, the men who didn’t even come out?

But these women, Mark tells us, were paralysed with fear. **Little wonder! Something has gone wrong with the script! - or something so right that they just can’t take it in!!!!**

Mark finished his gospel there. Full stop. The women left terrified, saying nothing, the men had been too afraid to come at all!!!! The end. I think such **confusion and disbelief is right there**. It rings true.

It's the world as we know it. Faced with a man saying that Jesus has risen, the women are confused and the disciples at first think the story nonsense. And Fair Enough!

The story of Jesus rising from the dead is hard to swallow.

Isn’t that how we would be in such a situation?

Put yourself in their shoes. Would you believe such a far fetched tale told to you at dawn by a young man sitting inside a tomb?

I believe that Mark deliberately ended his Gospel at this point.

By the way, if you look at most good modern translations of the Bible, they will have a footnote to explain that from verse

9 of Mark 16 has been added later to round off the story.

Mark finished with confusion and disbelief. Why?

Remember that by the time he was writing his Gospel, somewhere about thirty years later, there were vibrant Christian communities established in dozens of cities across the Mediterranean world. There were men and women prepared to give their own lives for their belief in Jesus, who was crucified yet risen.

How could such faith be? How could it possibly happen? Mark leaves us with a dispirited band of previous followers of Jesus, and with two Mary’s and Salome who find the story unlikely.

And they went out and fled from the tomb; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid. What turned things around? What changed? How could there be, thirty years later, dozens of Christian communities all over their world. What could explain this?

How do you understand, Mark is asking his readers, this discrepancy between the crushed disciples on Good Friday and Saturday and the disciples after Easter Day and the lively churches 30 years later? What happened to take things beyond three confused and frightened women?

Unless....unless what the young man in the tomb had said, **was true**. Unless Jesus had somehow transcended death and was very much alive. Unless Jesus did go before them and met them again in Galilee. Otherwise, how was it that a story that ends with a whimper, explodes with a mighty roar of love across the whole known world?

But one thing is for sure.

One thing they knew, that somehow, the world was not the same any more, somehow there had been a radical shift, the script of life had taken a new direction, something they and many of us still had great faith in - I mean the finality of death, had been turned on its head. Even more it was a new world, with God on the loose, on the move, out there, going on ahead.

In resurrection they saw the world according to God.

The facts about life and death had changed.

They didn't know what to do about it just yet.

This change was a fearfully sharp change from the way things had always been. There was no experience to go on and fear was the natural first response - but we the readers know – they **will find out and they will tell it, this amazing good news,** and so,.. in faith **will we.**

May this Easter life and faith grow past our fears, and may we learn to tell of it with joyful enthusiasm too. Amen.