

Ministry District of Lower Yorke Peninsula

Easter Day 2010

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Mark 16:1-8

One of the markers of Mark's telling of the story of the resurrection is the abruptness of its ending. The women who go to the tomb are told to go back to the other disciples and tell them that Jesus has risen and goes on ahead of them to Galilee. Instead they flee in fear and tell no one. And there the story concludes.

In Mark there are no post resurrection appearances as are recorded in the other Gospels. For a long time it has pretty much been accepted that Mark finished with verse 8, and that what has sometimes been shown as verses 9-20 was added later – so that the ending was not quite so abrupt and because of the known stories of post-resurrection appearances.

So what is Mark trying to tell us by ending the story so abruptly? The first question it raises is how did the message get out if the women fled in fear and told no one? But perhaps the key is that Mark is presenting this to a community of faith which already believes in the Risen Christ. What is this saying to them about their faith?

In this passage there are several things to which this points. The young man dressed in white says that Jesus is not here, he is risen and has gone before them to Galilee. Galilee is the place from which the disciples came. Jesus has gone ahead of them to their place and waits for them. They can now go home and get on with the business of being his followers.

As an image this can be quite powerful. The women have gone to where they last knew Jesus to be, but have in fact have found that he is not there but back where they originally came from. They do not have to travel to find Jesus. He will travel to find them.

This is an understanding that resonated deeply with St. Benedict and the way in which he structured monastic life. The Celtic monastic style, on the other hand, drew from the call to Abraham to go to another land. Benedict spoke of stability, the Irish monks of perpetual pilgrimage. Benedict believed that by sticking at the everyday, by remaining with the community in which we were situated, that we had the best opportunity of hearing the voice of God and having our lives transformed by the presence of God.

Much of the modern world runs counter to that, our world has become transient, perhaps more like the Irish monks who travelled far from their homes to leave those ties behind and focus on God. Yet it is not really this – for much of this travelling to different places is not about finding God, nor really about enriching our inner life – it is about proving ourselves, about the next great opportunity, the chance to advance our standing, or simple wanderlust. At this Benedict would shake his head and remind us that until we stop we will discover nothing; and the young man dressed in white would say simply – he is not here, he is in the place from which you came.

That could become an excuse for changing nothing. But the resurrection is not about that – the resurrection is about transformation, about new life. But this transformation requires us to look in the right place, it requires us to pause and stop running after that which is new. Instead it encourages us to go home and the new will encounter us.

God will transform who we are and the life we live in precisely the place we are.

Galilee does not necessarily mean the place from which we first came, nor that place in which we have been for some time, it means a return to that place in our hearts where we first encountered the Lord. He will be there, waiting for us, for he is risen and has gone before us.