

Mark sermon series: week 7
19/07/15
08:00 Holy Communion BCP

Mark 15:25, 33-39; Mark 16:1-8

As we come to the last in our series of sermons on Mark's Gospel, we reach what appears to be the end of the story. Or so it seems. It has been quite a journey. Each week we have reflected on one aspect of the Gospel, tied up in Mark's own desire to present to the reader the central theme of Jesus bringing in the Kingdom of God. As Mark began his Gospel with dramatic words heralding the "Good News of Jesus Christ the Son of God" - with no frills, so his Gospel ends dramatically.

Mid-afternoon, outside the walls of Jerusalem (for such a criminal as this, such a threat to Rome and Judaism, could not be executed within the city), Jesus is hung on a wooden cross to die. This is the ultimate place of human torture and ridicule - and the place of divine forsakenness. A place where Mark's only words from the cross are "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me". But between those words and Jesus death something seems to change. Jesus knew his Father's business. Having proclaimed the Kingdom - healing the sick, restoring the dead to life, feeding the hungry, all signs of the Kingdom - Jesus must have known it was in this ultimate act of sacrifice that humanity might once know the path to restoration with God. Jesus now realises the love of the God of Love. And in doing this - now his mission is complete. Now he might die well; now he can breath his last.

And we read the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Surely symbolic of the grandeur of the events on the cross that day. For this death has divine, heavenly consequences as well as human. The temple was the dwelling place of Godself - so for the curtain to be torn was to show the true reality of what was happening. Things from this point forward could never be the same. Change has happened. Salvation is won. But the drama at the cross is not complete. Mark tells us it is the centurion - the very symbol of the Roman state - who identifies Jesus as the Son of God. There is no voice of the disciple claiming this faith - but it is the oppressor who knows what is happening. For to the disciple this death is utter failure. After following the Messiah for these years, seeing miracles, hearing their own call to discipleship, all their hopes are now dashed. The Messiah has cruelly been killed by the Roman and Jewish authorities. The human powers have won over God's power. It was not meant to be this way. The story started dramatically, and so it ends at a cross in drama, or failure.

Well, not quite!

We awake a day or so after with women going to the tomb to anoint Jesus body. But the stone in front of the tomb is rolled away - suggesting something awful has happened. Again, the drama and the sense of failure. There beloved Lord could not even be allowed to rest in peace.

But the women find a stranger who has a most bizarre message. "He has been raised; he is not here ... he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you". And it is from here that the women flee in fear, and Mark dramatically finishes. No resurrection appearances. No Ascension or Pentecost. Nothing.

But why - why does Mark finish here? Where is his resurrection?

As I preached on Easter day at our early morning service - the clue is in the reference to Galilee. Galilee was where Jesus' ministry was focussed - where the sick were healed, the hungry fed, the disciples received their call. Now the women were told to go to Galilee to find Jesus again. In other words - go in

you hearts to those places where you encountered him, and there you will find him risen for you. Mark's resurrection is back in the text of his Gospel. The disciples - and therefore us - are invited to go back to the start of the story to find the risen Christ. He is there ahead of us - in the call of every disciple to follow him. He is ahead of us bringing in God's Kingdom - in our community, in our time. We have to discover him and join in his mission. So Mark begs the question, where is your Galilee? How can you rediscover those places where you knew Jesus, that early enthusiasm, that honest appreciation of life that Jesus brings? And how will you pass it on? For the Gospel does not end here, but carries on in each one of us.

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