

Reflection on Mark 16:1–8
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When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. They had been saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on

the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you." 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.

"...and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid." Or as it might be rendered from the Greek: "And they went out and fled from the tomb; they were trembling and not themselves. And they told nobody anything, because they were afraid."

Some might find Mark's resurrection scene unsatisfying. I mean, it's not exactly an uplifting ending to what has already been a tragic story. As the scene opens, there appears to be a twist in the plot—a heavy tombstone rolled away, a man dressed in white with a message about Jesus being raised from the dead and waiting for them in Galilee. But this hope and potential seem to come to a swift end when fear takes hold. The good news and vision for the future seem to go nowhere.

But unlike the "happy" ending in the other Gospels, Mark's account of the resurrection leaves the conclusion of the story squarely with his audience—that is, with people like you and me. *We* are the ones to determine the ending, or *the beginning* as it is probably more accurately put. All who hear the Gospel and come to believe go on to write the next chapters *with our lives*.

Each of us, of course, must discern what comes next for ourselves. Where do we hear an invitation to love in the relationships and situations of our life? Where do we sense new life trying to emerge within and without? But the Gospel is also a communal word—primarily so, in fact. Mark is writing to people of "The Way". He hopes to encourage, support and guide Christian communities as we take up the ministry of Christ in our time and place.

As most of you know, I memorised much of the last half of Mark's Gospel and presented it in worship throughout Lent. One thing that stays with me this time around is the Gospel's spotlight on power—it's warp-ability that leads to all kinds of ill. Whether it's the disciples arguing about who is the greatest, or the religious leaders trying to trick Jesus with their debate tactics, or the cruel, dehumanising actions of those employed by the state to carry out the death penalty, power unshaped and matured by godly love can be dangerous and death-dealing for everyone involved.

I suspect this revelation was amplified for me by the graphic instances of power run amuck in these weeks. We've seen disturbing scenes of police officers in Myanmar ordered to shoot fellow citizens protesting the military coup. We've heard sickening accounts of women victimised, marginalised and silenced, not only in Parliament House but across the country. And then there's, of course, the constant flood of evidence that our relationship with the environment must change, and fast, if there is to be a liveable future.

Facing the results of distorted power can be overwhelming. Being informed of its effects can lead to resignation and despair. We hear another news story and think: *What can be done anyway?! I might as well forget about it... and eat another block of chocolate, drink another glass of wine.*

The helplessness and hopelessness we may feel is the same whether the unredeemed power is on the global or national stage or it lies closer to home, in our communities, our relationships and our hearts where it may be more subtle but no less harmful.

We may be tempted to shut out not only the complex, web of duplicity and stories of suffering, but, by default, the opportunities to be and do differently. By disengaging, we become like the women in Mark's Gospel who behold evidence of resurrection, but do and say nothing because they are afraid.

Thankfully, the ending of Mark's Gospel is designed to embolden our faith and propel us to action. If we've been listening *at all*, we reach the final verses and are stirred to take up our cross and follow. We may understand the reticence of the women, for Christlike love is risky business. But full of faith, we are prepared to act because the love that has been revealed—and hopefully we've experienced—is so real and compelling, we can do no other.

The Good Friday Prayer Walk arose out of this willingness to be present to the realities and pain in our community—as Jesus was—and to give voice to our hope for a more sustainable, hospitable, and just future. Given the vulnerability that has been revealed by the bushfires and now COVID—stories of hardship and inequality we hear often around here—the time is ripe for us to join the conversation about how we might rebuild differently. Friday was a small but significant step in this direction.

Which brings me to a second thing that stays with me from my Lenten journey. Those of us who walked and prayed on Good Friday did so among the bustle of commerce and leisure. The same is true for this morning's Easter dawn service where we gathered on the foreshore to sing and pray as rubbish trucks beeped and made noise, heavy equipment moved sand on the beach, and people passed by enjoying the long weekend.

As the church and the world emerge from COVID, what will be the shape of things?

The institutional church in Australia is in a depleted state—not just because of COVID but the many challenges faced by the institution over recent decades. It is tempting to want to reclaim something of what we might remember as “the glory years,” to claim a place for ourselves in society. But I hear the Gospel calling us to something more incarnated and inclusive; a strong and determined faith that is woven into and partnering with the whole of life and society. That meets people where we are at. This is especially important in our diverse, multi-cultural land that is already scarred by invasion and colonisation. New ways of being church must be found.

In contrast, then, the Gospel shows us what it is like to be *empowered* but uncorrupted by such things as self-interest, control, coercion, wealth or violence of any kind. As Jesus modelled, Christlike love sees the other—*sees the other!*—and wishes for *their well-being*. Its aim is *liberated life for all*. This is quite a remarkable thing, I think, in a culture of consumerism and “usury” and something to strive for in ourselves and as a church community.

So, along with the stumbling disciples, there are characters in Mark’s Gospel who inspire and with whom we might also identify.

For instance, there is the desirous reaching of the blind beggar in Jericho. Bartimaeus reaches out to the Source of love and mercy and he will not be deterred. What might a church defined by its reaching look like? a reaching toward the Source, a Source who is beyond any name, colour or creed?

There was also the woman who anointed Jesus with perfume before his death amidst the scorns of onlookers. What might it be to entrust and devote ourselves completely to the strange way of Jesus—a way of humility, hospitality, and unconditional love—even when it is misunderstood and scandalous?

And what about the prophetic presence of the poor widow whose offering of two coins—all that she had—highlighted the neglect of the religious community? How can we as a church be a prophetic presence? By what we do here and the stories we bring out into the open, how can we shine a light on needed change?

Finally, in the Gospel, we see nameless people playing their part—be it lending colts, spreading branches, carrying water jars, or opening up a guest room. Each one is doing what she or he can to serve Jesus, without notoriety or bells and whistles. What might this look like in our church? How can each of us kindle our unique gifts and play our part as together we answer the call to be Christ’s instrument of love in Glenelg?

It was the first day of the week and the sun had just risen when the women came to the empty tomb. A new day had dawned, something fresh was illumined. They flee in fear and say nothing to anyone. May it not be so with us.