

Unfinished Business

<i>Text</i>	Mark 16:1-8
<i>Readings</i>	Colossians 3:1-17; Matthew 28; Mark 15:40-16:8
<i>Theme</i>	The gospel of Mark records the angel's news to the women and then ends abruptly.
<i>Purpose</i>	To call us to believe in the resurrection of Jesus and to tell others.

Sometimes you are reading a book and you turn the page and you find it has ended. You expected more but the story is over.

You can have that watching a film; it ends at an unexpected point that catches you by surprise.

The gospel of Mark ends abruptly. Most biblical scholars agree that the gospel ends at verse 8. Verses 9-20 of Mark chapter 16 are not found in the earliest Greek manuscripts and show a different style of language and content from the rest of the gospel. They were probably written by someone other than Mark to round out the conclusion of the gospel. Under the direction of the Holy Spirit, in the formation of the canon of Scripture, the gospel, it seems, originally concluded at verse 8.

In this way it ends suddenly. This is not what we expected.

Maybe Mark wrote a bit more but that original ending was lost; the end of the scroll may have been torn off or damaged.

Or maybe Mark *intended* this ending. That would fit with the sudden *beginning* to this gospel: "The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God." Mark takes us directly into the ministry of Jesus. And as he tells the story about Jesus he moves quickly from one event to the other. And then he *ends* this gospel as suddenly as he began.

In this way the Holy Spirit has left this gospel open-ended. It leaves us with unfinished business. It is intended to draw out a response. The Spirit wants us to do something with what we have read and heard and seen by faith.

And so as we consider this account of the resurrection of Jesus we will see that:

1. His death was real.
2. His resurrection was revealed.
3. A response is required.

1. The women who made their way to the tomb on that morning had no doubt that **Jesus' death was real**. They had seen him die. They were there.

In his account Mark made special mention of the women at the crucifixion.

In chapter 15:40 he says; "Some women were watching from a distance"; and in verse 41; "Many other women...were also there."

In verse 47 he notes that Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph saw where his body was laid. They had been there the whole time. They had seen him suffer and had seen him die.

This is worth noting because liberal scholars have tried to explain away the resurrection by claiming that Jesus did not actually die; rather, they say, he was unconscious and while he was in the tomb he came to and then somehow got out.

This, however, goes against everything we know about Roman executions. Jesus had been flogged. Many people died from the flogging alone because of the horrendous injuries and resulting loss of blood.

Then he had been crucified and these women had heard him cry out just before his death and had watched him take his last breath.

They had seen the Roman soldier thrust his spear into Jesus' side to make sure that Jesus was dead; they had seen the blood and water come out, certain evidence of death.

They had watched as his dead body was taken off the cross and wrapped up in linen; and they had followed to see where he was laid. Jesus had died and been buried.

As they made their way to the tomb very early on that morning after the Sabbath they expected to find the lifeless body of Jesus.

They carried spices so they could anoint his body. The Jews didn't embalm bodies as the Egyptians did; rather they were taking spices so the body wouldn't smell so much.

As they went they discussed among themselves how they were going to get into the tomb. They had watched as a very large stone had been rolled in front of the entrance; a stone the size of a cartwheel had been rolled into a groove or a slot in the ground. They knew it would be very difficult for them to move that stone up out of that groove and then push it away.

The women went there expecting to find the body of Jesus in the tomb. Again this is worth noting because another explanation of the resurrection is that the disciples, including the women, *expected Jesus to rise*, and so, *in their minds*, he *did rise*! In other words, the stories about the resurrection were the result of wishful thinking.

But again this does not fit with the gospel accounts. These women did *not* expect Jesus to rise. The resurrection of their Lord was beyond their wildest dreams; it was the last thing they were thinking of. They knew Jesus had really and truly died.

So their belief later was not the result of wishful thinking; it was not a story made up by the early church.

No, their belief was based on the explanation they received from the angel and the evidence that Jesus had indeed been raised.

2. Secondly we note that **his resurrection was revealed**.

When the women got near to the tomb they were surprised, even shocked, to see that the stone had been rolled away. They went in, looking for the body.

Tombs in those days had two rooms. First there was an entrance chamber, then there was a small doorway less than a metre high which went through into the burial chamber itself, which was about two metres square. They went into this burial chamber and noticed a young man in a white robe on the right side.

Notice the detail. Later on the women told Peter what had happened, Peter told Mark, and Mark wrote it all down.

This young man was an angel. We know this from the other gospels and because he gave them a message from Christ.

The angel confirmed they were in the right place. (verse 6) “Don’t be alarmed”, he said. “You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene who was crucified.”

Again some have tried to explain away the resurrection story by suggesting that in the semi-darkness of the early morning light the women had gone to *the wrong tomb*. They found it empty and jumped to the conclusion that Jesus had risen.

But the angel confirmed that they were looking for the right person – Jesus the Nazarene, from Galilee – and these women were also Galileans.

He also confirmed what had happened to Jesus – he had been crucified.

They were looking for the right person and they were in the right place.

But he wasn’t there anymore! The angel declared; **“He has risen!”**

This is the astounding news of Easter Sunday! This is the most dramatic claim of the Christian faith! Jesus died and then rose again! This is a miracle. This is the most remarkable event that can happen – that someone who was dead should then come to life.

Jesus had predicted this and told them in advance, but they had forgotten. So the angel had to explain this to the women.

People have come up with *more explanations* for the empty tomb.

Maybe thieves had come and stolen his body; after all, grave robbery was not uncommon in those days.

Or maybe, as Mary Magdalene thought later, the gardener had come and carried him away (John 20:15).

Or maybe the disciples had come there during the night and had taken the body. The religious leaders had thought of that and had posted a guard to prevent that possibility.

None of these explanations are plausible.

Rather the angel explained the facts;

he interpreted the empty tomb;

he revealed what had happened – Jesus had risen! It was as simple and remarkable and astounding as that! He was no longer dead but was alive!

The angel then **displayed the evidence**: “See the place where they laid him.” The rock shelf was empty. The body of Jesus had gone!

The angel was patient with them.

He could have told them off for being so unbelieving and forgetful.

He could have rebuked them for being foolish women who should have known better.

But he didn't. He was gentle and reassuring. He confirmed the facts and explained the evidence. Jesus' body had been there, on that rock shelf, but he had gone.

3. This brings us to the third point because a revelation like this **requires a response**.

The women could not just walk out of here as though nothing has happened. You can't imagine that they would casually walk away saying to each other; “Well that was interesting. We can save our spices for another occasion. We might as well go home and get lunch ready.” No, there had to be some reaction, some response.

a. The first reaction in these women was **alarm!**

The word used in verses 5 and 6 is a very strong word and is translated as amazed, astonished, dumbfounded, and frightened!

In verse 8 we see more of their reaction: They were “trembling and bewildered”. The Greek word for bewildered is *ekstasis*, which gives us our English words ecstatic or ecstasy, used most commonly now for a drug. The Greek word literally means to be out of existence; we would say, “to be beside oneself”.

Matthew tells us that they “hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy.” (Matt 28:8). They were scared out of their wits. Dead men don’t get up; dead people don’t walk out of tombs. This was unexpected and beyond their comprehension. They could not cope with this and so they fled from the tomb in terror and confusion.

This is consistent with the *reaction of others* to Jesus during his ministry.

When he stilled the storm on the Sea of Galilee the disciples were alarmed.

They had the same reaction when he came to them walking on the water, and when he was transfigured before them on the mountain, and when he cast the demons out of the man called Legion. Each time they were amazed, astonished, and afraid!

There ought to be something of this in *our* reaction to Jesus. Too often we are casual or indifferent about the Lord and even about his resurrection. We know the story so well that we are a little “ho-hum” about it all.

But we need to stop and think about this.

We need to recognise the power and majesty of God displayed in the raising for Jesus from the dead!

This is the most astounding event that has taken place in the history of the world! It is right to be startled, awe- struck, astonished and even alarmed!

b. But the reaction the angel wanted to see in the women was to **“Go and tell his disciples”**. (Verse 7a)

At first did not tell anyone; (verse 8) they fled from the tomb and “said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.”

Sadly, this is often true of us. We don’t say anything to anyone about Jesus. We are afraid of their reactions, of what they might think of us, that they may laugh at us, or think us crazy or fanatical or some religious nut-case.

We know from the other gospels that the women soon got over their fear and hurried on to tell the disciples.

We also know that those early Christians told the whole world about the Lord.

We need to do this as well. This isn't something to keep to ourselves. Good news is for sharing. We need to go and tell others. The world needs to know what has happened.

Sure, there are people who don't want to know, who are not interested.

There are people who are hostile to the Christian faith and talking to them would be casting pearls before swine.

But you will meet others who are interested and who ask questions and who want to know more. So look for and pray for opportunities to go and tell others that Jesus has risen.

The Holy Spirit has given us this gospel of Mark, which concludes abruptly. It is left open-ended, unfinished.

The Holy Spirit wants a reaction from us.

Will you respond in wonder?

Will you respond with faith?

Will you respond as a witness?

Amen