

## EASTER! The Empty Tomb

Acts 10:34-43, Mark 16:1-8 [MW18-11]

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton at Mangawhai and Wellsford, Sunday 01 April 2018

I guess that way, way back at the beginning of the Christian church

- there were many accounts of “the resurrection” doing the rounds
- Mark’s was the first to be written down
- and in typical Mark style it is short, sharp, to the point

Something noticeable, *re-mark*-able even!

- is that Mark’s record of Jesus ends at the tomb
- Mark ends at the tomb [Slide 2]
- ... the empty tomb
- the empty tomb in the garden on Sunday morning
- there is no meeting with the risen Jesus
- just three women attempting to pay their last respects
- a young man in white
- and the empty tomb [Slide 3]

The women are initially alarmed

- then they become confused and start shaking all over
- as they ... run away
- ... too afraid to tell anyone

Hardly seems like something worth celebrating

- a total anti-climax!
- and it must be said, typical Mark stuff
- ending the greatest story ever told with what seems an incomplete ending
- to use modern terminology: no “closure” of any kind

This has perplexed readers from Matthew to the present day

- Mark’s abrupt ending forces readers to reassemble the rest of the story
- out of clues given earlier in the gospel
- nothing in the narrative tells the reader whether the women broke their silence
- except for the presence of the ‘tomb story’ itself

Throughout his gospel Mark has insisted that the cross [Slide 4]

- the cross is the way to life
- and so Mark does not compromise the paradox of suffering service
- by producing a glorious triumph in the end

The women’s response at the tomb also brings readers face to face

- with the mystery of faith
- for there are no “heroes” among Jesus’ followers
- the hostility that puts Jesus on the cross
- has reduced all Jesus’ followers to flight and fearful silence

Nevertheless God brings faith out of just such weakness and failure

- Jesus did not choose new and better people to be disciples  
the original disciples were the ones who God used to spread the Good News
- this is a highlight, an emphatic reminder  
that however imperfect our faith  
however many times we remain silent when we should speak  
... we can always return to the Lord
- none of us can get so far away from Jesus  
that we cannot be touched by God's healing presence

Which leads on to the other major difference between Mark and the other three gospels

- two words that are in Mark and no other gospel (any idea what they are???)  
the young man at the tomb says to the women:  
"go and tell his disciples and Peter" [Slide 5]
- AND PETER  
and *especially* Peter [Slide 6]

Remember Peter, the rock on whom Jesus said he would build his church?

- Peter who said he would go anywhere, do anything for Jesus?  
Peter who on the night Jesus was arrested three times, three times!  
denied even knowing Jesus?
- go and tell his disciples AND PETER

How those words must have cheered Peter's heart

- tortured with the memory of his cowardice and disloyalty  
and then this special message for him
- isn't that amazing  
isn't that just the best news
- Jesus thought not of the wrong Peter had done him  
but of the remorse Peter was struggling with

An empty tomb and a special message [Slide 7]

A man looking for the first time at the stupendous spectacle of the Grand Canyon said after a long period of silent awe, "Something must have happened here." It was a bit obvious. It was a bit obvious that that deep gouge in the earth was not caused by an ancient Indian dragging a stick along the ground. Such a result demanded an adequate cause.

So too we can look at the dramatic turn around of Peter, of the disciples

- of the creation of the church, and say: [Slide 8]  
"Something must have happened here"
- and the only adequate "something" is the resurrection of Jesus

Contrast the Peter in the courtyard on the night Jesus was arrested [Slide 9]

- "I don't even know this Jesus you're talking about"  
with the Peter preaching in Acts, as in our first Bible reading [Slide 10]
- "Jesus was put to death on a cross. But three days later,  
God raised him to life ...  
... we were the ones God choose to tell others about him."

William Barclay wrote: *[Slide 10]*

By far the best proof of the Resurrection is the existence of the Christian Church. Nothing else could have changed the sad and despairing men and women into people of radiant joy and flaming with courage.

Something must have happened here!

Jesus is not a figure in a book – Jesus is a living presence

- it is not enough to read about Jesus, to discuss him  
Jesus is someone to meet
- the Christian life is the life of a person who knows Jesus  
not knows *about* Jesus, but *knows* Jesus

Most people know *about* Queen Elizabeth or our Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern *[Slide 11]*

- but not so many actually *know* them
- the greatest scholar in the world who knows everything about Jesus  
is less than the humblest Christian who actually knows Jesus

Our Saviour and Lord, Jesus Christ, is a living Lord

- and precisely because he is a living Lord  
there are new wonders and new truths to be discovered all the time

Perhaps for this reason we might say Mark chapter 16, verses 1-8

- the shortest and least detailed account of the resurrection  
is the best and closest

There is of course that kind of abrupt ending to Mark's gospel

- which has compelled endless speculation:  
did it intentionally end with an anti-climax of silence and fear?
- was the final page of the gospel lost? *[Slide 12]*  
is there a 'proper' ending somewhere ...

And yet those final words

- have an appropriate, atmospheric, probing, searching quality: *[Slide 13]*

*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 (Mark 16:8)*

There is a real fitness in the fact that Mark's is an "unfinished gospel"

- for the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is always unfinished  
it is a "to be continued" story *[Slide 14]*  
to be carried on in individual lives

Reflecting on the great events of Easter

- the continuing story of the Good News of Resurrection  
here is a reflection titled: 'The Promise of the Empty Tomb'
- I'll read it, and the words will also be on the screen  
*[Slide 15, 16, 17]*

*The promise of the empty tomb  
Rips the rug from under your feet,  
And says hold on tight  
We're going for a ride  
Into the deep unknown*

*The promise of the empty tomb  
Says the story doesn't end the way  
You think it will.  
Yes, your future is set in stone,  
But I carved it and it's beautiful*

*The promise of the empty tomb  
Says you are worth so much more  
Than you think you are  
You are to die for  
And I did*

*The promise of the empty tomb  
Drives nails through darkness  
And says trust me  
I have a plan  
And it is good*

*The promise of the empty tomb  
Rolls back the stone  
Dances on death  
And says why are you crying,  
Don't you know me?*

The empty tomb means we have another chance

- another chance at life  
another chance to get over our fear, our hesitation, our mistakes  
our frozenness, our timidity, our silence

As that poem says, the story does not end the way you think it will

- there is an unwritten page *[Slide 18]*  
an unwritten page left for each of us
- a fresh, clean page on which we are to write  
our record of what the risen Jesus has said and done in us