

Text: Mark 15:42-16:20

Theme: Christ the King is Risen

Sermon delivered by Revd Canon Dele Agbelusi during Easter Sunday Service of the Word on 01/04/2018 at 10.30am

Introduction and Synopsis

Perhaps you heard about a family in Japan several years ago who for a few hours had their lives turned upside down. It began with a traffic accident in which a man died. The police arrived on the scene and examined the body. The victim was badly disfigured but several of the witnesses thought they knew the car and identified the victim as a 60-year-old local shipbuilder.

Police contacted this man's family and a brother-in-law came to officially identify the body. "Yes," he said, "That's him. That's my brother-in-law." Then he went home to break the sad news to the rest of his family. They in turn quickly spread the news to other family members who promptly gathered at the home of the widow. As you might imagine this was a scene of deep mourning. Family members embraced one another, shared remembrances, made funeral plans, etc. Suddenly, in the midst of their time of grieving, the front door opened and in walked the 60-year-old shipbuilder who was thought to be dead. This poor unsuspecting man had come home from a hard day's work and was wondering why all the relatives had gathered at his house. Had he forgotten some special occasion?

Can you imagine the celebration those family members had at his appearance? Now this was not a resurrection; it was simply a case of a mistaken identity. But think of the joy in their hearts as they phoned the police to tell them to start their identification process all over again, because the one they thought was dead had just walked into their living room.

On that first Easter Sunday the small handful of grieving Christians would have been thrilled if it had been a case of mistaken identity when their Master had been pronounced dead. Then they would have rejoiced immediately to see their Lord return to them. Then it would have been just one of those things that sometimes happens. But a resurrection? Nobody they knew had ever been resurrected from the dead. Such things just don't happen, do they? Notice the confusion that resulted.

Mark 16 is not a popular text for Easter Sunday, compared to the accounts of Matthew, where Jesus appeared to the disciples and he gave them the great Commission to go and preach to the whole world. Or Luke's account where Jesus accompanied some disciples on the way to Emmaus and he lectured them on what the prophets said about him and how the Messiah must die and rise again. Or the account of John where Jesus spoke to Mary and the encounter with Thomas, who wanted to touch the prints on the hands of Jesus. Those are mind blowing encounters that we ministers, love to preach on, on a day like this.

Characteristically for Mark, he ends his gospel in verse 8 with a picture of the women trembling and bewildered and they fled from the tomb and said nothing to anyone because they were afraid! How can you end your story in verse 8, Mark? This must have been the feeling of an early scribe who tried to give Mark a more befitting ending like the other gospels.

You will notice in your Bible that the Gospel of Mark contains verses 9 to 20 in some of its ancient manuscripts. But the most reliable and earliest manuscripts stop at verse 8.

Surely we need more triumph, more preaching the gospel across the globe, more tongues-speaking and being able to drink deadly poison without being harmed (vv. 17,18). But that ending would spoil the challenge Mark really wanted to leave us with.

Much of our discipleship is not victorious - it is of the trembling and bewildered type. But Jesus is still beckoning to us doubters to leave everything, to take up our cross and follow Him.

So, in spite of the seemingly abrupt ending of the account of Mark, it:

- 1. Gives Us Confidence in the Resurrection of Jesus**
- 2. Gives Us Courage to Speak for Jesus**
- 3. Affirms that Nobody Comes to Jesus with Clean Hands**

1. Confidence in the Resurrection of Jesus

Mark tells us that Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and Joseph, and Salome witnessed Jesus' crucifixion (15:40). Then he told us that Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of Joseph witnessed Jesus' burial (15:47). Now he tells us that "Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, bought spices" (v.1b).

These women, then, serve as witnesses to the **death, burial, and resurrection** of Jesus. Having women serve as witnesses is unusual, because Jewish law does not accept women as witnesses in legal proceedings. If the church had been fabricating this story, we can be sure that it wouldn't have used women as witnesses. Women witnesses, therefore, constitute evidence that this story is true. Mark was out to report the whole truth about Christ's resurrection without any embellishment. The spices were brought for a dead Christ, because they were not expecting him to have resurrected. This is where the account of the Gospel differs from the Christ of the Muslims who argue that Jesus Christ did not die, and if he did not die, then he could not rise again! And if he did not rise again we are still dead in our sins. We might as well turn this place of worship to a betting shop or a disco house!

The Centurion had certified Jesus as dead. When the spear was thrust to his side and water and blood gushed out, there was no feeling as he was dead. But the Lord Jesus rose from the dead. If there is no Easter in your life, you are still stuck with Good Friday- sorry Dreadful Friday- because what makes that Friday good when Christ died on the Cross was the fact that He rose again on Easter day.

Good Friday was like the payment for our debt. Easter Sunday is the receipt that the deed is done. The Transaction is a done deal. If Christ had remained in the grave, He would have been a liar and you cannot trust his words and every other thing he had said would remain buried with him. And why would the disciples give their lives for something they knew was a lie?

The resurrection of Jesus witnesses to the immense power of God Himself. To believe in the resurrection is to believe in God. Only He who created life can resurrect it after death, only He can remove the sting and gain the victory over the grave (1 Corinthians 15:54–55). The resurrection of Jesus Christ validates who Jesus claimed to be, namely, the Son of God and Messiah. According to Jesus, His resurrection was the "sign from heaven" that authenticated His ministry (Matthew 16:1–4) and the proof that He had authority over even the temple in Jerusalem (John 2:18–22). The resurrection of Jesus Christ, attested to by hundreds of eyewitnesses (1 Corinthians 15:3–8), provides irrefutable proof that He is the Saviour of the world.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is not only the supreme validation of His deity; it also validates the Old Testament prophecies that foretold of Jesus' suffering and resurrection. Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25), and in that statement claimed to be the source of both. There is no resurrection apart from Christ, no eternal life. Jesus does more than give life; He is life, and that's why death has no power over Him.

Verses 5-7, Why were the women afraid?

⁵ As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed. ⁶ “Don’t be alarmed,” he said. “You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. ⁷ But go, tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.’”

Consider their emotional state. They are caught up in terrible grief. It is very early in the morning. They have gone to the tomb expecting to encounter nobody but find themselves in the presence of a heavenly being. It is no wonder that they are afraid. Fear is a common response to the divine presence (4:41; 5:15, 33; 6:50; 9:6; 10:32).

They are also afraid because they came to the tomb knowing that death always has the final word. But the tomb that should be closed is open. The body that should be present is missing. A young man dressed in heavenly white robes is sitting where the body should be lying. Next they will learn that Jesus’ death was not the end. The absolute truths that they have trusted all their lives that death is the final stage for every living being have turned out not to be absolute, shaking the foundations of their worldview. No wonder they are afraid.

“Don’t be alarmed. You are looking for Jesus, the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen. He is not here. See the place where they laid him!” (v. 6). The phrase “has been raised” is a divine passive verb—meaning that God took the active role and raised Jesus from the dead. Jesus’ resurrection represented more than Jesus’ return to life. He is more than another Lazarus, coming out of the tomb to enjoy a few more years of life (John 11). **Jesus’ resurrection represents the defeat of death. After Jesus’ resurrection, death will no longer reign supreme over all of life, because he was “the first fruits of those who are asleep” (1 Corinthians 15:20)—the first of many who would be restored to life after death. “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive” (1 Corinthians 15:22).**

2. Mark wants to Give Us Courage to Speak for Jesus

Mark gives us the name of Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Council...went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus’ body’ (v. 43). His courage is remarkable as he was a well-known member of the Sanhedrin whose treachery had crucified Christ. In days to come, Joseph would no doubt face some awkward questions for associating himself so openly with a ‘blasphemer’ like Jesus. Compare this with the account of the women in verse 8: *They went out, and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had come on them. They said nothing to anyone (oudenì ouden—“nothing to no one”); for they were afraid.*

Mark is asking us a penetrating question at the end of his gospel - which type of disciple are we? Are we the fearful, distant type who doesn't say anything about Christ to anyone because we are concerned how people might react? Or are we the Joseph kind, taking our courage in both hands, and publicly associating with the controversial Christ, no matter what the cost - giving ourselves and our money (new tombs were expensive, like the woman's perfume in Ch. 14) to honour Jesus in a world that wants to see Him dead?

Mark, wants us to interrogate the resources that can remove fear from us and make us effective witnesses. I believe he is drawing our attention to the fact that we are still work in progress. The Holy Spirit of God is still an absolute necessity to make us what we should be. At the opening chapter of Mark’s Gospel, John declared “I baptise you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit.” That is the key. That is the answer to our fearfulness. The Holy Spirit that will be given to the believers is what will unlock their door and enable the Peters to speak to the high and the low with boldness.

3. Mark Affirms that Nobody Comes to Jesus with Clean Hands

“But go, tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you’” (v. 7). The disciples fled when Jesus was arrested (14:50-51) and Peter denied Jesus three times (14:66-72). This charge to the women, then, is a grace note. Jesus has forgiven these men and will maintain his special relationship with them in spite of their failure in the hour of crisis.

Mark 16:8a. They went out and Fled from the Tomb

8They went out, and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had come on them. They said nothing to anyone (ouden denouden—“nothing to no one”); for they were afraid.

The young man’s counsel not to be alarmed (v. 6) has little effect. These women are afraid, so they say “nothing to no one”—a double negative for emphasis. All the Gospels portray the male disciples as unfaithful once Jesus is arrested. Mark’s Gospel now portrays the women as unfaithful as well. That fits well with our understanding that nobody comes to Christ with clean hands. We all need forgiveness—even these women who have heretofore been so faithful. It can be helpful to recognize that these women, whom we tend to put on a pedestal, have clay feet. But the assurance that all is forgiven with respect to Peter and the other disciples gives the hope that these women will not be left on their own. The grace of Christ avails to them too. So if you are feeling a little overwhelmed by your own fragility or disappointed at the failure of others close to you, take heart—you are in good company.

This confirms Jesus Mission and his statement that ‘It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but those who are ill. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.’ (Mark 2:17). Where are you? Jesus is looking for you and calling you home. Will you run to him? Are you fearful and unable to speak for Jesus? He has made available his Spirit to lift you up and embolden you to stand for him.