Easter Day **Mark the Evangelist**
8/4/2012

Acts 10:34-43
Psalm 118
I Corinthians 15:1 – 11
Mark 16:1 - 8

The said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid

...and they said nothing to anyone for they were afraid... The Gospel according to Mark ends abruptly. He breaks off in mid sentence and seems to deny us closure to the story. Many have suggested the original ending was lost or suppressed, and later, extra verses were added to provide a complete conclusion. Is the ending a fault of the editors - a literary problem? Did Mark run out of space, was he interrupted or die, or did someone attack his manuscript? Or did Mark intend to conclude his "Good News of Jesus Christ" in this way?

Mark's ending is not accidental, and it is not a literary problem. It is a theological proclamation, which teaches us something about who God is, and the human response to the works of God. The fear and silence of the women is consistent with the fear, astonishment and incomprehension that, in Mark, so often characterised the disciples' reaction to what Jesus did. While the resurrection is not described in these verses, or anywhere in the New Testament, there is a sense in which Mark's gospel is saturated with resurrection. He lets us in on the secret from the beginning. When Jesus begins his work of teaching, healing, saving the disciples from the storm, feeding the crowd and calling sinners to new life, the time has come and the creative, restoring power of God is already engaged with the world.

On the three occasions when Jesus predicted his death, resurrection is mentioned directly, although the disciples are charged to remain silent about this knowledge until after the event. The fear and silence of the women completes the picture of the faithful who end in disarray and incomprehension. For Mark the last thing the disciples expected was to find that God would triumph! Mark's ending shows that for the disciples, having been taught by Jesus and witnessing the power of his work was no preparation for the final event. It baffled the mind and defied the imagination, and the women were not consoled by what they saw or heard.

Mark is showing us that resurrection is so radically other it could never have been calculated from nature or worked out cognitively. This revelation is of such a kind that it challenges us to rethink all that we mean by transcendence. When we use this word we normally think of God's surpassing greatness and are immediately drawn to the language and categories of omnipotence; a lofty version of human categories of power, success or freedom. The resurrection is the greatest challenge because here God speaks when there is no trace of the human left to go on. What happens in the resurrection is that the world experiences a manifestation of the sheer unimaginable difference of God re-created. No wonder fear and awe marked the day.

Mark's ending is dramatic irony. If the silence of the woman was the last word, how did Mark come to write his Gospel, and how did we come to be reading it, and celebrating it like this today? Mark's ending is part of his gospel witness to the Easter faith. He shows us that God succeeds in spite of us, without our aid. God brings new life where none was expected. The church springs to life, not because of the virtue of the disciples, or the imagination of the women, but because of a revelation that comes from God's side, which changes the way we see life, and renews our discipleship. The Good News of Easter Day is that Jesus Christ will not be domesticated or confined, and with him even the cross and the grave do not have ultimate power. No longer bound by time or space, the crucified one goes before us on the road of faith, and calls us to meet him there to become part of his living body in the world.

Mark's tantalizing ending seems to deny closure, but it is there for the relationship between Mark and the reader. While silence was the first testimony, ironically we are here celebrating the outcome of this story, which continues, but not in the extra verses others tacked on later. It is a never ending story. And please God, the next instalment is even now being written, in us, and all those who respond to the Risen One.
Christ is Risen! …… Thanks be to God!

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