

Homily – Easter Day

Mark 16: 1-8

Christ is Risen! **He is Risen Indeed!**

Well, today is indeed the most glorious day in our Christian calendar. The day in which an angelic proclamation is made outside of an empty tomb. A young man in a white robe declares to the visiting women, “He has been raised; he is not here”. He is, of course, referring to Jesus of Nazareth who only three days earlier had ignominiously been betrayed, tried in something of a kangaroo court, and then crucified. And, in this very act of raising Jesus from his tomb, God “swallows up death for ever” as Isaiah prophesises in our Old Testament reading. It’s a great example of ancient Jewish scripture speaking into the Gospel, into the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Well, what do we make of these last 8 verses of Mark’s Gospel? Unlike the other Gospels, Mark chooses not to give any account of Jesus’ post resurrection appearances. His version ends with the women running away in terror and amazement. This rather abrupt ending, clearly didn’t satisfy some later readers, and scribes subsequently provided a number of alternative, more descriptive endings, bringing this Gospel into line with the others. But Mark’s original ending is actually a challenge, a challenge to us all who are hearing it, as indeed, the first community of faith would have heard it, 2000 years ago. Let’s look at it a little closer.

The scene opens in the morning, “when the sun had risen”. Notice Mark’s use of symbol here, the risen sun! The previous chapter had ended in darkness, with Jesus’ death in darkness, and then his burial in the evening. The women who had been at the cross and the burial have come to anoint the body now that the Sabbath is over. The male disciples had already failed him, denied him and fled in fear before the crucifixion. The sun rises and the stone is rolled away from the tomb’s entrance. God, the protagonist of our story and indeed the whole story, has entered the scene.

The women are surprised, and even more so, when a young man in a white robe announces the Easter message to them: “He has been raised.” In this moment, human experience and expectation have been transcended by the transforming power of God.

Jesus' question on the cross "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" has been answered. He has not been forsaken. In his obedience and faith, he has been raised.

The women are then told by the messenger to let the disciples know that Jesus will meet them in Galilee as he promised at the last Supper, when he said in chapter 14: "You will all become deserters; But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee." The stage is set for an encounter in Galilee where fear, failure and flight will be forgiven and discipleship restored. They will see him there, as he promised.

But how do the women respond? Well, they too, join their brothers, the disciples, in their response to these seemingly unexplainable events. They flee in fear and say nothing to anyone, thus ending Mark's Gospel. Their failure in this last task provides for Mark's dramatic conclusion. All humans, men and women, fail in their discipleship. But the very existence of the Markan community 2000 years ago, and our community here at Christ Church South Yarra today, means that Jesus and his disciples did in fact meet in the Galilee despite the lack of communication from the women. God, in his love for us, initiated that meeting, not humans. The disciples were forgiven and their relationship with God restored, not through their own design, but by God's will.

So too for us, that despite our own fear, flight and failure, God continues to love us and meet us through his risen son Jesus, and restores us to right relationship with him. This is the Good News. That God keeps his promises. That Jesus will go before us, and his presence overcomes our failures. This is what Mark's conclusion is: a resounding affirmation of God's design to overcome all imaginable human failure, in and through the action of his beloved Son. So, let's take up the challenge and be like Jesus. Let's be obedient and faithful to our loving God, and listen to him. Then surely, he will keep his promise and we, like Jesus, will also rise, and death will be defeated.

The Lord be with you.....