

Sermon 5 April 2015  
1 Cor 15:1-11 Mark 16:1-8 'Grace to tell'

*Prayer: Alleluia! We praise you, O God, that by grace Christ has conquered death! We praise you for the grace poured into our lives because of this day. Live in us, that in the power of your grace we can tell how Jesus story is good news for a waiting world. Amen.*

**"Power** consists in deciding which story shall be told."<sup>\*1</sup> And this year the story we have been told comes to us from the Gospel of Mark – **Mark's Easter** story of the death of Jesus of Nazareth. <sup>\*2</sup> In Mark the Easter story is a celebration of defiance. The authorities killed Jesus. That should have been the end, but now the stone has been rolled away. **There is no Jesus** in the tomb. He has risen! The story invites colour and grandeur, passion and emotion, questions and faith. cV

The *other* gospels tell it their way eg: Matthew adds an earthquake and perches a shining angel atop the stone. Luke has two shining figures. John makes it the scene of a first ecumenical competition as Peter and beloved disciple race to the tomb in response to the news. The story-tellers run wild with celebration, leaving a trail of quite diverse accounts, which defy harmonisation and bear witness to the power of the imagination. But Mark is the first to tell the story; his gospel is the earliest and influenced the others. I find it food for reflection just how they added 'more' to the first story of Jesus of Nazareth's death.

One of the most obvious 'more's' is that the verses Derek read to us today is where the first manuscripts of Mark's story ended. "8 Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid." *Scholars* tell us that this ending would be **completely consistent** with Mark's understanding of Jesus; his **life, crucifixion and resurrection**. The ending is left completely open for his followers to **make their own** ending – to find themselves in the story and make it their own – a kind of *giving away of power* so the story shall continue to be told by those **in the story!** Cv

*I want to come back to this in a moment* because that's **exactly** what happened for **Paul**. He found himself in the story and discovered the power he called 'grace' which had such an effect on him it **enabled him** to tell the story... but for now Mark's story is left wide open – how does it end? cV

Clearly the women did go and tell and at least three versions exist that happening to chapter 16! Even for Mark who wants us to understand Jesus completely from the view of the cross, Jesus death is not the end of the story. The huge emotional scene that he leaves us with – loss, raw grief, loss of understanding, loss of motivation for following Jesus, the sense of the greater political power winning and silencing the voice of one who gave spoke out for the marginalised, the poor, the ordinary, the powerless ones, an outpouring of grief.... CV

**We grieve** when one who we love dies; *some of us* grieve when we lose international sporting games! Some of us grieve when codes of conduct/morals are transgressed... grief has all manner of expressions and we **all** know at least one of them... **but how many** of us have stood in shoes the size of Jesus loved ones and followers? **Risking all** through the following of THE "One" who stood up to the political and religious powers of the day, calling them to account in the name and with the power of YHWH-God?

**And we wonder** at Mark telling us this about the women: "8 Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid." But even for Mark – this is **not the end**. The women **are told** to tell Peter and go to Galilee. <sup>\*3</sup> Now if you remember the basic Easter story, the disciples were recorded as high-tailing it out of town, and Peter was last seen denying he ever knew Jesus. *Remember Jesus predicting* the cock would cry two times on Peter's third denial? But in this scene – in the empty tomb, Mark's story tells us that the resurrection of Jesus **reclaims them all**, gives a new start, new beginning – and it all began with Peter - **this is grace**, God's grace at work! Cv

<sup>\*1</sup>Carolyn Heilbrun, 20th century, <sup>\*2</sup>W Loader, <sup>\*3</sup>Petty,

*The scholar J Petty points out for our reflection that there is more in this story he says: "On the other hand, the message has a barb in it as well. Yes, be sure and tell his ne-er-do-well disciples that the way forward is into Galilee, and, pointedly, not Jerusalem. (Jesus had earlier said, in 14:28: "But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.")*

**If**, as *is thought*, Mark was written around AD 70, he is writing, therefore, **in the context** of the destruction of Jerusalem, a catastrophic event. The **way forward** will not be with the compromised "head office" in Jerusalem, but in Galilee, where the movement began, and where it will yet be continued. The mission and work of the Crucified is being regenerated in the place from which it sprang." Cv

**Mark** ends his story where it all began, this **can't be** an accident, it has to be his intent but Petty says that as an ending it is so unsettling that 'there at least three attempts were made to fix an additional ending to it. But actually it's absolutely possible that Mark knew exactly what he was doing when he stopped writing. **Remember** that the gospel opens with these words: "The **beginning** of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." The entire story Mark **has just told** is only "the beginning." When **the book ends**, the mission of Jesus is being regenerated in the place of its own "beginning." Cv

*In Mark* <sup>\*3</sup> the resurrection account is only 8 verses, during which time Jesus does not *actually appear*, and ends with the women's confusion and fear. This is understandable if Mark *doesn't want* to take any emphasis away from **the cross**. Even in the resurrection account, Jesus is identified as "the crucified." Did you know that the only time in the entire gospel where Jesus is proclaimed "Son of God," and this designation is *allowed to stand*, is at his crucifixion and death? The centurion says: "Truly, this man was **God's Son**."

**Only at his crucifixion**--only after knowing the course of Jesus life, his mission, his teachings, and how he died to **further those teachings**--is one able to say who Jesus really is. And then – "in this moment, this **Now**", Mark tells us the mission of Jesus continues. It continues through those who "follow" Jesus, those who understand and live "the way of the cross." Now, Mark says is the **where you join** the story and continue in its telling it because it has become your story, yours is the power to decide which story to tell. Will you tell Jesus story?

Paul found he could, *much to his surprise I suspect!* He reminds us of his Damascus road meeting with the risen Jesus in verse 8, and how that event turned him from persecuting Jesus followers to joining them! There is so much beauty in his story, as he tells is in verses 10 and 11: '**10** But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them--yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. **11** Whether, then, it was I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.'

*But by the grace of God I am what I am...* whether your name is Paul, Mark, Jesus... by the grace of God we are completely **who we are meant to be**- scars, hearts, tears, smiles, nerves, worry, fearful, silent... running into the future, waiting in an empty tomb... by the grace of God we are who we are **and it's all right**. Perhaps even more than just all right, **dare** we believe **who we are now** – is just perfect with God because he loves a challenge☺, and no matter what we challenge him with, it will never match Jesus resurrection challenge! Cv

"*I am who I am and God's grace in my life is not without effect*", Paul wrote, **and you and I** know the truth of it. We know that God's grace is effective – it works; we know that his grace has an effect – our lives are touched positively, healthily, healed and restored... Grace is at work in us, on us filling us with presence and power because of Jesus and Easter Sunday's **successful** challenge. You have the grace, you have the power – **will you tell His story?** Amen

<sup>\*1</sup> Carolyn Heilbrun, 20th century, <sup>\*2</sup>W Loader, <sup>\*3</sup> Petty,