

Mark 16:1-8

The two Mary's and Salome go to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body, but they find the stone rolled away and a young man in a white robe tells them that Jesus is risen, and instructs them to go and tell the disciples. The women leave the tomb afraid.

When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. They had been saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you." 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.

The ending is awkward, unsatisfying, and incomplete. Most of our Bibles contain two more endings, added later, perhaps centuries later, as none of the earliest manuscripts contain them. It's understandable why they were added. Because while Mark starts out in the usual fashion - it's early Sunday morning, it's still dark, the women are going to the tomb to tend Jesus body, the stone is rolled away, they hear word that Jesus has been raised, they're sent back to tell, but then this: "So they went out and fled the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid." Mark's Gospel ends with with fear and silence. There is no presence of the risen Christ. Of all the Easter Gospels, Mark's story invites us to stand where those first trembling witnesses stood. Those three women didn't see Jesus. Neither do we. They didn't hear Jesus call their names. Neither have we. They weren't invited to touch his wounded hands. We haven't touched Jesus' hands either. Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome are our silent sisters. The narrative is left for us, the readers, to complete. Resurrection isn't a conclusion, it's an invitation. Mark's Gospel is all about setting us up to live resurrection lives and continue the story of God's redemption of the world.

COCU31B.Easter Day

The Easter season reminds us that Christ's life is inextinguishable, and invites us to know the reality of resurrection in our living. The supporting readings all offer a glimpse of the inclusivity of God's Reign as it was expressed through Jesus. Resurrection brings life and salvation not just to the Jews, or even the disciples, but to all people. The Acts reading is taken from Peter's sermon to the Gentiles in Cornelius' house and celebrates God's inclusive love and life, and the Isaiah prophecy proclaims that God's salvation, and the feast that accompanies it, is for all people. The Psalm takes the celebration of God's life and salvation to a personal level, but acknowledges that God's rescue came even when the psalmist required God's discipline. In a similar way, Paul reflects on how Christ appeared to him even though he was persecuting the followers of Jesus. The Gospel tells the story of the empty tomb - the moment of resurrection that made life available to all of the people that are mentioned in the other readings. It show the inclusive grace of God in a reality that would have been shocking for the first believers - the first witnesses to the resurrection were women, and it was they who were given the responsibility of sharing the news with the men. The essential message of this significant day in the Lectionary is this - God has given life to all people, and it is in this inclusive resurrection community that we find and enjoy God's life. This is not just an individualist, escapist Gospel, but an invitation for the entire cosmos to enjoy the gift of resurrection together.

One of the great fallacies of human history is the persistent belief that some groups or individuals can find life and liberation alone, or at the expense of others. The last century has demonstrated how mistaken this way of living is. We have seen how closely connected we are, and we have experienced how the emphasis on our separation from one another and from our world has brought great suffering and conflict on us and others. The life that God offers is neither for only some people, nor is it only for some other reality after we die. Rather, God's life can and should be known and enjoyed now, but can only really be experienced together. While it can be tempting to think about the resurrection only in metaphysical terms, a whole new world of possibilities opens up when we see how resurrection permeates everything. When we live as resurrection people, we recognise that we participate in resurrection in every moment that we bring life to others, whether through caring for our environment, working to alleviate poverty, serving those in need, learning to understand other cultures and people, or living more simply and peacefully in order to foster justice and equality in our world.

(John van de Laar, Sacredise)

Psalms 118

A psalm of celebration and thanksgiving for God's salvation, affirming that the psalmist will not die, but will live, and rejoicing that the rejected stone has become the main foundation stone.

O give thanks to the Lord, for God is good;

God's steadfast love endures forever!

Let Israel say, "God's steadfast love endures forever."

The Lord is my strength and my might; God has become my salvation. There are glad songs of victory in the tents of the righteous: "The right hand of the Lord does valiantly; the right hand of the Lord is exalted; the right hand of the Lord does valiantly." I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the Lord. The Lord has punished me severely, but God did not give me over to death.

**Open to me the gates of righteousness,
that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord.**

This is the gate of the Lord; the righteous shall enter through it. I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation. The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.

This is the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes. This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Psalms 118 (from Psalms for Praying, by Nan C. Merrill)

We give thanks to you, O beloved, for you are kind, your steadfast Love endures forever! Let every nation proclaim, 'Your steadfast Love endures forever'. You are my strength and my song; you are my Counsellor and my friend. Harken to songs of victory, to the music of my soul: 'You, O Loving Presence, have been my strength. You have stood beside me in the darkness. You have walked with me into the light'. I shall not give in to fear, but I shall live in peace and give witness to your saving grace. You turned your face from my weaknesses, and You opened the door leading to new life. Yes, you opened to me the gates of truth and justice that I might enter through them. Praise be to you, O Merciful One! This is the Door to Life; those who know Love shall enter through it. I give thanks to You, O Beloved, who answers our prayers and invites us to new life. The stone which the builders rejected has become the foundation of our lives. This, O Eternal Listener, is your Work; it is marvellous in our eyes. This is the day which you have made; let us rejoice and be glad in it!

Acts 10:34-43

Peter preaches that God does not show favouritism, but welcomes and saves all. Forgiveness is available to all who believe in Christ.

Peter began to speak to them: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ - he is Lord of all. That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. We are witnesses to all that he did in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that all who believe in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

The message preached by the apostles was that Christ died for our sins, was buried and rose again, as witnessed by hundreds of disciples.

Now I would remind you of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand, through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you - unless you have come to believe in vain. For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures. He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve, then to more than 500 brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he appeared to James, then all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them - though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. Whether then it was I or they, so we proclaim and so you have come to believe.