

Order of Worship

Mark 16:1-8

Introduction

Imagine what it would have been like to be there on that first Easter morning. Imagine waking on the Sunday morning exhausted after the emotion of the weekend. Friday spent watching your friend die a tortuous death. Saturday mourning while others celebrated the most important festival of the year. And now Sunday. Finally the important rituals to commemorate this special life can be performed, even if it is a day late.

It's hard enough to be in mourning – anyone who has lost a loved one will know that. All those firsts are extra difficult. Remember that first Christmas, or first birthday without your loved one. When the death happens close to a significant time, that time can be tainted forever. Celebration and pain mingled.

Imagine creeping out of your home on that first Easter morning. Walking silently through the streets, trying to dodge soldiers who may be on the lookout to round up any supporters, or still drunk for revelry the night before.

Imagine the quiet stillness of the city that has not yet woken. Walking through deserted streets to await the opening of the great gates; those all-important and solid gates that can shut friends in and enemies out. Imagine approaching those gates and the people who keep them, wondering if they are for you or against you.

Imagine walking through the solace of the garden towards the tomb where a few days ago he had been laid. The worry of how to get into the tomb and the fear of the state of his tortured body inside. Will the smell of death be overwhelming? Will the stench of decay leave you wanting to retch, unable to do the all-important ritual for which you came?

Imagine all this.

Then imagine hearing:

He has been raised; he is not here.

No wonder the women fled.

Reflection

The resurrection scene in Mark's gospel is a cliff-hanger. It leaves us wanting more and there is little wonder there are two additional endings to the story. The very oldest texts we have finish the Gospel with the women fleeing from the tomb and there is no resolution to the story...

There is no resolution to the story but for a small detail – the story is being read. It is not just being read, it is being valued by a community that does not need the story to continue. Their community in itself is the continuation of that story... our community is also a continuation of that story.

Other Gospel writers felt the need to give stories and proof of resurrection appearances. There are stories that show the physicality of the resurrection – with Jesus eating or inviting people to touch him. There are stories about the commissioning of the disciples, the giving of the Spirit, or ascension into heaven. The writer of this earliest surviving Gospel had no need for stories of resurrection

appearances, simply the women were given the news by an angel and they fled in fear.

Imagine you were one of those women going to the tomb. Imagine walking there with some other women, who had also been friends and disciples of Jesus. There is some comfort in keeping company with others whose lives were touched deeply by the one who died. It takes away the loneliness of grief and each can bear each other's' sorrows.

There is no need to explain the sadness. Conversations can happen in fits and starts, because the others understand. Grief is a lonely experience, but these women were able to mourn together. There is some comfort to be found with being with others who are grieving.

Imagine now approaching the tomb in the garden and encountering the angel. Of course, the women in the story do not really know what is happening. What would you feel? Confusion? Anger? Would you even recognise the young man as an angel?... after all, it is unlikely that you had previously encountered such a being.

Imagine trying to relate what happened to people who had not been there. How would you explain what happened at the tomb, what you saw and what you heard. The cynicism of responses:

Hysterical women, they would say... Can't be relied upon. No wonder their word is only worth half a man's word in court...

Imagine the snide remarks and knowing there were not enough women there to make the testimony reliable in your culture.

Would you really pass on the message in those circumstance?

Yet a miracle occurred because the women fleeing is not the end of the story, and that is why the end of the story does not need to be written. It reminds us that God can overcome every human failing, even when the women fled from the tomb in fear, somehow the news of the resurrection became known and new life was blown into the fledgeling community that sought to follow the teaching of Jesus and put the love of God first.

The first community to hear this Gospel knew this. They knew it as they faced persecution by both Rome and the Jewish establishment. They faced their fears and stared down death. Individuals may not have survived, but the community of love certainly did.

We do not need the end of the story written either. In many ways, it is still ongoing. We are yet another chapter in this story and the challenge is also there for all of us as a community as we see our modern day issues that we face. Our issues are different, but do we allow this to be the end of the story, or do we look for resurrection? Do we flee and never speak of it or do we recognise the miracle that continues to occur?

We are a community in the hope of resurrection. Where does the story go to from here?