

## **Easter Sunday Service: Mark 16:1-8**

**Sermon preached by Rev. Laurel Barr at Roseville Uniting Church**

**on April 12, 2009**

When you think about it, resurrection is really quite terrifying! A grave that has been opened! A grave that is empty! The women who went to the tomb to anoint Jesus body with spices fled “for terror and amazement”. In fact they were so overcome they didn’t tell anyone.

Mark’s Gospel ends in trembling and silence.

*“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.*

Something awesome is at work here. In the story of the women running *in terror and amazement* from the empty grave, we glimpse the incredible power of God – the power of God at work - God who in Jesus resurrection has defeated evil and violence. God who has defeated death itself – in fact brought life out of death just as God had created the world out of nothing. .

And more, the raising of Jesus is a vindication of everything Jesus has done and stood for - It says that Jesus is Lord for the kingdom of God he proclaimed has overcome the power of the mighty Roman Empire which in Jesus day controlled the lives of people from Britain in the west to India in the east with an iron hand! That first Easter morning, the women catch a glimpse of all this: The power of God to transform death and darkness into life and light. And while they couldn’t have understood it all in that moment – no wonder they tremble in the presence of it and flee and all that remains is silence .

So did Mark really intend to end his Gospel so abruptly and leave us in such suspension, asking “What now?”

Or was he like a good soap opera script writer leaving us poised for the sequel he had already planned? Or had his original ending been torn away from the manuscript – was it lost? Did he assume that his first century readers knew the ending any way?

Others have added alternative endings for the Gospel of Mark but for me - I find the original suspended ending very compelling -

For me, when the women fall silent - we the listeners or the readers – are drawn right into the story – we are dared to complete it. Of course the women must have eventually told the story (as Jacqui’s Mary did for us today) – if they hadn’t, where

did the story come from? – But I think that with his abrupt ending, the writer of Mark's Gospel is throwing the ball over into our court.

He dares **us** to continue this story. The women were silent - It is the readers– it is you and me who are called to continue this unfinished story – we are to be the ones who tell the good news about the risen Jesus Christ who bring life and hope and peace.

Listen again to what the young man at the open grave said to the three women.

*“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.”*

**“He is going ahead of you to Galilee – there you will see him.**

Galilee? Why Galilee? Because in the first chapter of Mark's Gospel we read that it was into Galilee that “Jesus came proclaiming the good news of God and saying – the Kingdom of God has come near. Turn your lives around and trust in the good news.” And it was in Galilee that Jesus made this message real when he taught with parables, he healed the sick and those with infirmities, gave hearing to the deaf, liberated people of the demons that bound and tormented them, them, fed the hungry crowds, forgave sinners, showed hospitality to outcasts and gathered together his new community.

And so the Galilee of the women and Peter and the disciples – and our Galilee is the place where we engage in sharing the good news of Christ's grace and love and life with people.

Our Galilee is our neighbourhood here in Roseville and this part of the North Shore where we live, - it is our schools, our workplace, our leisure places, the young families we contact through ministries like Kids Playtime, places like Archbold House, active retirees such as those who come to Friday College, frail aged people, those who are unwell for whom we pray for at our healing and wholeness services, migrants settling into their new home, disadvantaged parents and children in Bidwell and Doonside in Sydney's west.

Our Galilee also broadens out further through our wider church's places of ministry – the streets of our city among homeless people, people with a drug addiction, prisons, hospitals, aged care facilities, indigenous communities, refugees and migrant communities, struggling rural communities, inland Australia and in Asia, Africa and the Pacific through our partner churches and Lent Event and Ambassadors for Peace And finally Galilee is those places in our lives which long for healing and

hope and light and renewal – You can get the picture: Galilee is the place of engagement and ministry. - Wherever we are engaged in serving people in the name of Christ and bringing his good news of abundant life and light and hope.

And friends it is here in the midst of ministry in our Galilee where people are being tended that the Risen Christ promises to meet us. The risen Christ is always ahead of us - calling us on –surprising us with new life and hope.

Let me tell you a story from our Galilee which has inspired me. A small group from this congregation recently attended the opening of the third Newpin house for disadvantaged mothers and children in the west of Sydney. Many of these women are from homes where there is abuse, addiction, broken relationships and a lack of self esteem – some women come to New pin seeking help even to relate to their children – how to talk to them. This new house is in St Marys and the mothers from Bidwell and Doonside where our Roseville ReadySteadyGo programme is in operation and Viv Fries helps out every week were there to help celebrate. They have a choir and one of the songs particularly moved me. The words were written by one of the mothers Suzannah-Jane Boles: Let me read some of the verses “I lost my way”:

Once my world came crashing down  
And spun out of control  
The pain of loss that took a hold -  
It caused me to lose my soul.

The ice chill winds of winter  
They covered me in snow  
And the darkness came a shrouded me  
And caused the light to go.

The chains of life I once held dear  
Were holding me to my past  
And the demons that surrounded me  
They locked me in the dark

Then the light came shining through  
The answer to my call  
You held my hand and walked with me  
As once again I stood

You were the source of light to me  
You helped me break the chains  
Your love and friendship shined on me  
And it helped to heal the pain.

The light came shining through that day

And I knew thing would be right  
I stopped to take a look around  
And gave thanks you-re in my life.

Now I am on my way  
To where I want to be  
That place where every heart lies deep  
Where I know I can be me.  
I lost my way, I lost my way in life  
But now I've found the light.

When I met the person who wrote this beautiful song she told me how she couldn't sing it without her eyes filling with the tears of thankfulness and encouragement. Her song is a resurrection song. In her life the resurrection story continues. And it is in experiences like this woman's that we encounter the powerful presence of the risen Lord at work transforming lives.

Christ is risen! What now? Friends, the unfinished ending of the Gospel dares you and me to have the courage to continue the story. On Good Friday we asked if we could trust God in view of the dark and painful places and evil and violence in the world.

Today on Easter Sunday we discover a wonderful and humbling invitation: God trusts us to take his transforming love and life into these places and to continue the Gospel story. We each have a part in it! Your life – my life –has real significance in the purposes of God. And so the story of resurrection plunges us back into ministry to others with renewed energy and expectancy and courage to go to the edges.

For because of Easter Day, we know what we do is not in vain. It is never futile. The risen Living One who has already overcome the power of evil and the futility of death goes ahead of us. And that makes all the difference.

Let us pray:

We praise you, O God, for Christ has conquered death! Make all things new in our lives this day. Live in us, that we may proclaim to the world the good news of Easter Day and play our part in your continuing story. Amen