

Mark 16:1-8

The Empty Tomb and our Empty Graves

Nunawading and Waverley, 4-3-21

Dear friends in Christ,

The tomb was empty and that is good news for us; it is Easter news. It means we are not going to spend long in our graves. It could be thousands of years and yet by faith in Christ, it is not even a moment. What we are saying goes against our normal experiences not to mention our understanding of biology and physics. The two Marys and Salome were doing what was normally done, embalming though not mummifying. They thought they were going to have a problem with the large stone wheel of a door but they soon discovered they had something more serious: an open tomb and no body. There at the tomb, the ladies were presented with the miracle of Christ's resurrection: the stone was rolled away though exceedingly heavy; and a strange, young man was saying that Jesus had risen. This was the first announcement of the resurrection which would be followed by many appearances and many words from the risen Lord Jesus.

The proclamation of the resurrection is worth listening to. Do not be alarmed, Mark, the writer of the gospel, said. Violent death is alarming. It is quite disturbing to hear of it in the news. No matter how much the young man tried to calm them, the women fled from the tomb because terror and complete bewilderment had taken hold of them. And they told no one anything for they were afraid. They informed the disciples but could not say anything publicly because nothing seemed to make sense and they didn't want to be arrested and interrogated. I won't go into detail but I have been involved in some terrible deaths you cannot put into a neat box but today we hear that the fear of death is ended by the risen Jesus. When shattered by death, our risen Lord has already suffered your loss and is beside you to share with you his triumph over death.

You are seeking Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. The women were looking for a corpse to anoint and quickly learnt that they were wrong. Funerals should be conducted well but there is now a limit on how far we take them. There is grief but death has been swallowed and engulfed by the power of Christ's risen life. The worst was done to Christ, as Mark said:

he was crucified. A terrible evil was done to him but he turned all the wickedness on its head. Now we have this wonderfully new way of dealing with someone who dies. The person who dies in Christ is not just a dead body. Our eyes say one thing but now our trust in Christ tells us really clearly that we should be seeking a living person; a person made alive by Christ.

He has risen. There are extraordinary resuscitations; even up to an hour after being pronounced dead, some people have returned to life with minimal or no damage, such as Sean George, a Christian doctor who works in Western Australia, whose heart had stopped beating for over one hour. No one does this after two days, however. Nor is anyone glorified, nor constrained by doors and walls, nor able to appear then disappear. He is risen, tells us that Christ got up from lying down where Mark was sitting at the right. Yes, he got up but the words are saying more than this. He is risen is the news that Jesus has left his dead state to now walk in an eternal state, forever alive.

He is not here. But go and tell his disciples and Peter that they are to travel ahead to Galilee where you will see him, just as he said to you. The women had to stop looking for the Lord Jesus in a tomb and in a similar way, we have to get used to believing that we will not be there, either. Now that Christ is risen, he reaches into our cemeteries and takes us to himself. By faith, we are seated with him in the heavenly realms, as the apostle Paul says. We are in two places, members of this physical world but also members of Christ's body, children of an eternal kingdom. We should then seek him where he is, seeking to be in his glorious presence in heaven. We, also, seek him where he is found on earth, here amongst his people. Metaphorically, we now travel ahead of others for a special meeting with our Saviour. Others have nowhere to go. For you and me, the risen Christ has given us a direction to go in. You can live with a meaning and purpose to a place where you can see him face to face.