

# *The Parish of Wellow*

## Resurrection: Fact or Fiction?

### Mark 16:1-8

### Passage, Sermon Notes and Questions

Please feel free to take these sermon notes home with you and you may wish to find some time during this week to consider the questions below.

## 1. Sermon Passage

### Mark 16:1-8

1 When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body.

2 Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb

3 and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"

4 But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away.

5 As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.

6 "Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him.

7 But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'"

8 Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

## 2. Sermon Notes

### 2.1 Introduction - 'He has risen! He is not here!' (Mark 16:6)

- Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome stumble across that first Easter Sunday, the most significant event in history: the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- If what they have been told and discovered is true then they and the disciples, and every Christian since have the strongest possible evidence that Jesus is the Son of God. It also means that all those promises that Jesus made about eternal life would be true as well.
- But can it be true? Can it be true that Jesus lived and died and rose again? Is the resurrection a fact or is it just fiction?
- Down the centuries this truth, central to the Christian faith, has been challenged by many.
- When examining the evidence for the Resurrection four keys things need to be considered:
  - i. the empty tomb
  - ii. the transformation of the Apostles
  - iii. the preaching and teaching of the resurrection that emanates from Jerusalem
  - iv. Five popular arguments given to explain why the tomb was empty.

### 2.2 The empty tomb

- Jesus was a well-known figure in Israel. His burial sight was known by many people.
- Matthew records the exact location of Jesus' tomb. He states, "And Joseph of Arimathea took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth and laid it in his own new tomb" (Matt. 27:59).
- Mark asserts that Joseph was "a prominent member of the Council" (Mark 15:43).
- It would have been totally foolish for the Gospel writers to invent a man of such prominence, name him specifically, and designate the tomb site, since eyewitnesses would have easily discredited the author's fallacious claims.
- Both Jewish and Roman sources testify to an empty tomb.
- When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, telling them, "You are to say, 'His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.'" (Matthew 28:12-13) If the tomb was not empty, why does Matthew record that the chief priests bribe the soldiers to tell a lie.
- If the tomb had not been empty, the preaching of the Apostles would not have lasted one day. All the Jewish authorities needed to do to put an end to Christianity was to produce the body of Jesus.

### 2.3 The transformation of the Apostles

- It is recorded in the Gospels that while Jesus was on trial, the Apostles deserted Him in fear.
- Yet 10 out of the 11 Apostles died as martyrs believing Christ rose from the dead. What accounts for their transformation into men willing to die for their message?
- It must have been a very compelling event to account for this.

## 2.4 The preaching and teaching of the resurrection that emanates from Jerusalem

- This is significant since this is the very city in which Jesus was crucified.
- This was the most hostile city in which to preach.
- Furthermore, all the evidence was there for everyone to investigate.
- Legends take root in foreign lands or centuries after the event. Discrediting such legends is difficult since the facts are hard to verify.
- However, in this case the preaching occurs in the city of the event immediately after it occurred. Every possible fact could have been investigated thoroughly.

## 2.5 Four popular arguments to explain the empty tomb

1. The wrong tomb theory:
  - This theory argues that the women just got confused in the early dawn mist and Jesus' body was in some other grave just a few yards away.
  - But how would this be possible given that they'd seen where Jesus was buried just 36 hours before and some of them had helped bury him.
2. The swoon theory:
  - This theory argues that Jesus was not really dead
  - Perhaps the Romans bodged the job and couldn't tell the difference between a dead body and one still breathing?
  - But again this cannot be the answer. The reason the Romans did not break Jesus' legs was because he was clearly dead already.
3. The stolen body theory:
  - This theory argues that the (Roman or Jewish) authorities stole the body.
  - This too seems unlikely given that 7 weeks later Peter is proclaiming that Jesus, unlike King David, has been raised from the dead.
  - Surely at that point the authorities would have produced the body?-- or, at least, explained what they did with it? It would have suited them far better to find the body and squash the embarrassing claims of Peter and the other early Christians.
4. The hidden body theory
  - This theory argues that Jesus' followers couldn't bear to leave things alone. They stole the body, buried it somewhere else, and then started these silly stories about Jesus being alive again. A brilliant little game, only it was a complete fraud!
  - To disturb a grave was itself a capital offence. That's why the authorities would not have dared to remove the body (instead they placed some guards around it); nor would the disciples have dared to do as well.
  - Why risk it? What would they gain except trouble?
  - Nothing suggests that they were in the mood for such a courageous gamble, or for playing silly games. Their hopes were in tatters buried in that grave with Jesus.
  - No, the disciples did not steal the body; instead they were convinced that Jesus was indeed alive having risen from the dead.

## 2.6 Our response?

- Can it be true? Can it be true that Jesus a man, lived and died and rose again?
- This man claims to be the son of God. He claims in John 14 verse 6: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."
- If the resurrection is fact that we need to take the claims and words Jesus very seriously.
- If, on the other hand the resurrection is fiction then all we can say about Jesus is that he was either mad or bad. The decision is ours.

## 3. Questions to consider back at home

3.1 Why is the resurrection so important to the Christian faith?

3.2 Do you find any of the popular arguments to explain the empty tomb convincing?

3.3 If you are convinced that 'He is risen' and that 'He is not here' will you, as a result, do anything differently?

3.4 You get talking one day to a devout Muslim. He tells you that he believes Jesus to be a great prophet but not the son of God. How would you respond?

If you would like to discuss these questions further please feel free to call me on 01761 432293