31 March - 6 April 2024 What it means to be Easter people

Mark 16:1-8

**16**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.[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+16%3A1-8&version=NIV#fen-NIV-24882a)]

**Bible notes**

Mark’s Gospel moves straight from the burial of Jesus to this account of the discovery of the empty tomb. For the women who discover the tomb, however, two nights have passed, with a whole day in between, of living with the absence of Jesus and the knowledge and witness of his death. The events of this week’s reading are experienced in the context of having lived through that ‘holy’ Saturday. Mark’s account is brief, and (except in the longer ending in some versions) without the resurrection appearances recounted in the other Gospels. The resurrection is spoken of, but not witnessed, and so readers are left to draw their own conclusions. However, the missing body suggests that if a resurrection has taken place, then it is a physical one: the same body that died has been raised.

Clearly this account is not the end of the story, as the women, keeping silent through fear, must at some point have spoken out. Their role, however, adds authenticity to the account, given that in that time and culture women were not seen as reliable witnesses so would not have been the means to add credibility to the story. The inclusion of the women, along with the singling out of Peter who had so recently denied Jesus, demonstrates the restorative message of this story, in keeping with what we know of Jesus, but not in a way expected of the longed-for Messiah.

There is a lack of detail and explanation in this account of the empty tomb: the identity of the young man (probably intended as an angel), how the stone was moved, the whereabouts of Jesus, how the message was finally shared. Perhaps living the resurrection, being Easter people, entails trust while living with questions, uncertainties – all against the backdrop of the reality of Holy Saturday.

**Reflection**

 Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.

When a caterpillar turns into a butterfly, it’s a messy process. Inside the chrysalis the caterpillar’s tissues are dissolved – it turns to mush. The cells then divide and reform to become the butterfly’s various body parts. Once fully formed inside the chrysalis, and when strong enough, the butterfly emerges. This is a struggle, but a necessary struggle to strengthen the new butterfly, allow it to expel waste and make its wings functional. Being Easter people is also a messy process and a struggle. Belief does not always come easily. Allowing ourself to be challenged, growing into a new person, takes time and effort. Transformation is rarely instant.

Questions for reflection

*You may wish to use these questions and the picture to help you think about or discuss issues arising from this week’s Bible passage.*

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**Questions**

* What are the reactions of the three women who visit the tomb?
* How does the Easter message transform your life?
* What does it mean to be shaped as a community by the joy and wonder of the resurrection?

## Prayer

Adapt to your local context.

**A prayer of thanksgiving**

Response after each line:**Alleluia, alleluia, give thanks to our risen Lord.**

Lent and Holy Week is gone, that journey over.
Maundy Thursday called us to service and devotion.
Good Friday pained us and stained us and drained us.
Saturday stopped us in our tracks, reflecting.
Easter Day brings us resurrection that never will be over.
Christ is risen for us and within us.
Beyond the fluffy chicks and Easter eggs there is life in all its fullness.
In the midst of our joys and delight:
In the midst of suffering and pain:
God is with us, God within us.
**Alleluia, alleluia, give thanks to our risen Lord.
Amen.**

## **A prayer to end the Bible study**

Easter joy is to be shared,
to be grown, to be treasured.
As we go out into the world and a new week,
may that joy be our strength, our inspiration,
and our refuge in trouble.
**Amen.**