

Revd Michael Burns
Christ Church West Wimbledon
Sermon :
April 1, 2018 ~ “Easter Day”

Teasingly, in the best tradition of good drama, we were left hanging on at the end of the Palm Sunday gospel reading. You’ll remember that we had read chapters 14 and 15 up to the end that chapter of Mark’s Gospel, where the final part sees Mark record “Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where the body was laid”. But we have had to wait until today to turn the page and to read those spine tingling eight verses of chapter 16 that have just been read, the oldest story of the Resurrection: of the discovery, by the women, of the empty tomb, the appearance of a young man dressed in white whose message of reassurance causes them to flee in their terror and bewilderment, saying nothing to anyone because they are so afraid. And that is where Mark’s account finishes. Yes, it is true that, in our version of the Bible, there are some more verses which have been added to complete the story, but many doubt that verses 9 to 20 of chapter 16 are genuinely Mark and regard them as an addition. They’re really not his style and were probably added at a later stage by someone keen to do some tidying up and give the reader a complete ending. So some scholars have argued that the ending was lost or that Mark was prevented from finishing it because of illness or some other reason. Of course we know that the events didn’t finish there and we will discover “what happened next” in the readings for the next couple of Sundays after Easter.

Speaking for myself I like to think that Mark’s account did actually finish at verse 8, with the women fleeing, not saying anything to anyone because they were afraid. It. And perhaps that is deliberate. Maybe it is up to the hearers and readers – you and

me – to supply the ending – and that is the challenge of this gospel to all the followers of Jesus today. We are to supply the ending. But how?

Maybe we are to do that simply by our lives faithfully lived as today's 21st century followers. How about that for a challenge for each one of us. By our lives well lived, we know we have to go out and spread the Good News, to tell others of what we have experienced by our seeking to follow Jesus not just on his way to the Cross but as those who have experienced, in a variety of different ways, his resurrection in our lives. There is a real sense in which the story does not finish on that first Easter Day and is constantly being rewritten and added to by successive generations – of which we are now the latest part. It is not all neatly tied up and completed – it is still being written by our lives and by the lives of millions of Christians spread throughout the world. And it is being rewritten because of what we go through, of our experiences, both the good and the bad, which make up the kaleidoscope of our lives.

Our life experiences – both good and bad – help us on our journey as Christians, however hazardous that journey of faith may appear to be at times. We may be like the women – trembling and bewildered, not saying anything to anyone because we are afraid. But if we remain closed and silent, how will others hear the good news of the risen Christ in their lives in our world today? No, the plain truth is that the Lord is risen, he is risen indeed, alleluia – and we must be full of faith and courage as we not only speak those words but also seek to live them in and through our lives – so that the story of Jesus will live on in us.

St Teresa of Avila articulated it like this: “Christ has no body on earth but yours, no hands but yours, no feet but yours. Yours are the eyes through which Christ's compassion for the world is to look out; yours are the feet with which He is to go about doing good; and yours are the hands with which He is to bless us now”. May Easter come alive for others around us because we don't just say those words but we have the courage to live them?