

TUESDAY COMMUNION

Hymn: 176 O sacred head, sore wounded.

Reading: Mark 16.1-7

Prayers:

As they used to say at the end of Bugs Bunny, "That's it folks!" Mark's Gospel ends with the women fleeing from the tomb in terror and failing to pass on the message they have been given by the angel!

What follows is clearly much later piece of writing presumably designed to give a more satisfactory ending to the Gospel.

People have wondered why the Gospel finishes in terror and silence.

- Is it because Mark was seized and died a martyr's death, something which we have sensed as a possibility throughout this darkest of the four Gospels.
- Is it because the end of the scroll on which Mark wrote became increasingly worn as it was read and reread.
- Or is it where Mark intended to finish?

The strange thing is that the Gospel does come to an end at a point which makes sense.

In these last seven verses of the original Gospel Mark has told what needs to be said.

First, there was no expectation of a resurrection.

The women make a vain journey to the tomb in order to do for Jesus what wasn't done in the haste of the previous Friday – the anointing of his body. The tomb is sealed and the women have no expectation that it will be open.

Secondly, the core of the Gospel

When the women find the stone rolled away and they enter the tomb.

Before them is an angel, the representative of God.

The angel gives them a simple message,

"He has been raised; he is not here."

God has acted.

The crucified has been raised to life by the power of God.

Thirdly, the message

All the disciples have fled from Jesus and in that sense have denied him.

Peter has explicitly said he is not a disciple.

The message to the disciples and Peter is a declaration that they are forgiven.

They will meet with their risen Lord.

They are to go back to Galilee, back to their roots, and encounter him there.

Of course people ask, "What actually happened?"

The four Gospels all give differing accounts of the resurrection. What I believe is that this story and the stories we find in the other Gospels bear witness to what those first Christians believed was true: God has raised Jesus from the dead.

What is more, Mark's reference to the disciples meeting Jesus in Galilee suggests that after the Jesus' death and resurrection they did follow him back there. Having followed him by sight on the journey from Galilee to Jerusalem they followed him in faith and trust as they made the reverse journey.

There are times when no doubt many of us have felt that we have so screwed up our lives, been so unfaithful to Christ, that we deserve to be left where we are. Yet the word of God still comes to us,

- get up,
- leave behind your despondency,
- follow Jesus back into the life of this world and you will meet with him there.

And the women?

In Mark's Gospel time and again they are praised for their insight, their devotion and their faithfulness. It is ironic that, at the last, they fail to share the message they've been given.

Yet, in time, they must have delivered their message, and given to Peter and the other disciples the angel's words of life and hope.

For the message declares to them and to us that at the heart of creation

- there is the love that gives new life,
- the love that forgives and goes on forgiving,
- the love that we encounter in our risen Lord
- the love that is eternal and keeps faith

Maybe that's not a bad point to end this Gospel for it has revealed the love and power of our resurrection God and what it means to live as his faithful daughters and sons.

Amen.