

## Weak response - And that Ending...

Mk 16:1-8

*To understand this sermon, first look at Mark 16 in your Bible. You will see that Mark 16 originally ends with verse 8 and that verses 9-20 were written later. This means that the original text ends rather abruptly and without a positive response to the message of the resurrection.*

The Lord is risen, hallelujah! But do his followers believe it?

So far you may not have noticed much difference between Mark and the other gospels. But Mark does not end on a high. His book contains no reports of appearances of Jesus, and only the unbelieving response of the first 'witnesses' of the resurrection.

No-one saw the actual resurrection of Jesus; no-one saw him come out of the tomb. But people saw the effects, and the stone rolled away, and the empty tomb. Mark does report these things, but also the unbelieving response of the women.

The women are terrified. The comforting words of the angel have no effect on them. They just run away.

Mark has described many bad responses of Jesus' followers before, and continues with this to the end. Mark is critical of Jesus' followers throughout and until the last. (And Peter gets a special mention: he currently does not belong to the disciples.) On Thursday we saw Peter fail. Even today the followers of Jesus fail.

This makes the Gospel very credible: Mark does not tell a success story, but he admits the failure of the first witnesses. This makes it all the clearer that the Easter story did not originate in the minds of the first believers! Yet it is true. Look how the church has grown!

Mark does offer clues to the resurrection earlier on in his book. Jesus had foretold his resurrection at least three times:

- Mark 9:9: 'As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.'
- Mark 9:31-32 'He said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise." But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it.'
- Mark 10:33-34: "'We are going up to Jerusalem," he said, "and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise.'"

So Mark's story about Jesus is open-ended. It invites us to respond. (Compare the end of Acts.) The story is a challenge and we must respond. The best response is to go and read Mark's book again from the beginning. Feel just as disoriented as the disciples. Who is this Jesus? Then believe in him. Then go and tell others! Not about how good we are but that the Lord is alive!

In the resurrection God has provided the vaccine against death and perdition! There is life ahead of us! As 1 Peter 1:3-5 says:

*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!*

*In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade.*

Let us tell this gospel to all the world!