

Preached by Carl Rush  
Bush Hill Presbyterian Church  
Alexandria, VA  
April 12, 2009: Easter Sunday

John 29:1–18  
Acts 10:34–43  
Mark 16:1–8

## RELATING THE RESURRECTION

If we just had Mark's account of the resurrection, it would be most disconcerting, wouldn't it? But it would also be the most believable. Disconcerting, because in Mark ending at the 8<sup>th</sup> verse, where are all the resurrection appearances of Jesus? But, the most believable because the intention of Jesus and the angel's instructions are completely ignored by the women and by the disciples.

“Go and tell,” they are told. “Meet me in Galilee,” they were instructed. But they are afraid. Why does Mark's Gospel seem to end so abruptly at the tomb? The gospel writer reminds us how difficult it is to adjust our thinking to accept the resurrection. Someone who was dead has come to life again. This is the real story of Easter. God's love which became incarnate in Christ, which was crucified on the cross and his body is now victorious. It's as if God is saying all your dreams that have been lost—all your disappointments which have piled up like a mountain for you to overcome—have been defeated. The most likely ending to Mark simply reads, “So they went out and fled the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone for they were afraid.”

Now think about who these people are. These are the women who have been with Jesus for a long time. Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of James, had watched as Joseph of Aramathea had retrieved Jesus body from the cross and laid him in the tomb. They had been the ones who had stayed at the crucifixion, not running away like all the disciples. They were the ones who had provided for him and had supported him in Galilee. In fact, they may have been the only ones who understood his words when Jesus said, “The son of man came not to be served but to serve. They understood what it meant to serve others. His disciples took much longer to catch on.

But the women, they got it. However, in this moment, just like their male counterparts, these women are only able to relate to the resurrection up to a point. They have come expecting to finish their burial rites. They have a task to accomplish. They are not expecting a risen Savior. The emphasis here is not on their lack of understanding so much as it is on the perfection of all that Jesus has said to them up until this point. He told them he was going to Galilee to meet them. But still they come to the tomb instead. He told them he was going to Galilee because he wanted them to understand that they did not need to rely on their own strength any longer to be his students, his ambassadors, his co-proclaimers of the Good News.

The story played out before them. The stone had been removed even before they came to the tomb. Now Mark's audiences would have been well versed in all the resurrection appearances of Jesus—all the sightings and the encounters by his disciples and those

around Galilee. So when Mark writes down his gospel, he wants us to understand how Easter is a chance for God to finish the gospel story with us. Indeed, Easter is a midway point in the history of God's salvation for all humanity. For that history is still being lived out in you today. God wants to pin the rest of the gospel on your heart. God goes ahead of us into our Galilee experience. God precedes us into every life challenge.

The story is told of a man and his son riding in an automobile. Into the window flies a bee. The boy is terrified because he has been instructed to remember that he is allergic to bee stings. He was undone. But as they drive along, his father simply reaches out and grasps his hand around the bee and then he lets the bee go. The boy is again terrified, looking at his father is "What have you done?" And his father shows him the palm of his hand, and there is the stinger in his flesh. And he says, "The stinger can no longer hurt you. The bee is harmless. And the little boy understands. Death and disappointment. Failure. Sadness beyond our ability to express. Where is your sting? My savior lives.

Mark ended in verse eight, in all likelihood, because just as the tomb could not hold a risen Savior, the gospel of Mark would never in and of itself be able to express the good news of a risen Lord.

Resurrection isn't our responsibility. We aren't expected to roll the stone away. But we are expected to go and tell how Jesus has completely changed our lives. We don't have to fully explain it as if it is comprehensible. It's not something that anyone can fully put their head around. But we are expected to witness to this new reality he boldly sets up for us—our purpose in ministry as Christ's disciples.

Buechner has said, "The earliest reference to the resurrection in Paul's writings isn't a reference to an empty tomb." But his reference is to what really convinced people that Christ was risen from the dead. Not the absence of a corpse, but his living presence in their community—his living and abiding spirit within them, his victory over their utter amazement and confusion, his victory over their doubts. This is what convinced the world that Jesus is risen from the dead. And this is what carries us and bolsters us each day as we live his gospel.

So may it be for all of us and each of us, now and always. Amen.