

Sunday 11 May 2014 Worship, Milson Combined Church
Theme: "The best news ... He's alive!"

Readings: People were asked to get into small groups and different groups each had one of the 4 different Gospel accounts of Jesus' Resurrection morning, with questions.

Questions for discussion:

1. Who are the main people in this version of the Resurrection morning?
2. What events does this Gospel describe?
3. What events are not mentioned here?
4. In this version, what happens with:
 - the stone?
 - the body cloths?
 - angels/men in white?
5. Why seems to matter most to this Gospel writer?

Luke 24

New International Version (NIV)

Jesus Has Risen

On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. ² They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³ but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. ⁴ While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. ⁵ In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? ⁶ He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ⁷ 'The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.' " ⁸ Then they remembered his words.

⁹ When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. ¹⁰ It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. ¹¹ But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. ¹² Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.

Matthew 28

New International Version (NIV)

Jesus Has Risen

After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. ² There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. ⁴ The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

⁵ The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. ⁷ Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you."

⁸ So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹ Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

The Guards' Report

¹¹ While the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened. ¹² When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, ¹³ telling them, "You are to say, 'His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.' ¹⁴ If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble." ¹⁵ So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day.

The Great Commission

¹⁶ Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ...

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. ² So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"

³ So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. ⁴ Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, ⁷ as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. ⁸ Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. ⁹ (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) ¹⁰ Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.

¹¹ Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb ¹² and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

¹³ They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?"

"They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." ¹⁴ At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

¹⁵ He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Mary."

She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher").

¹⁷ Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her.

Mark 16

New International Version (NIV)

Jesus Has Risen

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.

Note: Two other endings were added to Mark's Gospel very early on. One was a short one:

"And all that had been commanded them they told briefly to those around Peter. And afterward Jesus himself sent out through them, from east to west, the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation."

The other was longer, and is in the NIV (our pew Bibles) as Mark 16:9-20.

Why do you think these other endings were added? Who by?

Could Mark's original ending have been lost (maybe his back page got torn off)?

Or could he have intended a 'cliff hanger' ending to his Gospel?

Sermon

Why do we have 4 Gospels? The early church could have easily (or not so easily!) combined them into one standard book with all the problems sorted out. 'What really happened?' 'Which version is the right one?'

Instead, the church by about 180 had decided to keep these 4 gospels. They had others to choose from, a gospel of Thomas, one of Mary, but these were written much later than our original 4, and were more influenced by Gnostic greek super-spiritual distortions of who Jesus was. Mark is the shortest and was mostly re-written & added to by both Luke and Matthew, so why did they keep the original as well as the re-writes?

What do you think? why keep 4 books what don't always agree?

The church decided that Truth was held by all 4, that all 4 were together necessary to honour the man who was Jesus of Nazareth.

So, back to the Resurrection stories.

I guess the first place to start from is – what do all 4 versions have in common?

- Jesus died. really was dead.
- buried in a tomb, a newly-dug one, not already occupied
- sealed with a stone – normal practice to keep out animals, may have been cut specially as a door stone
- the women went at dawn to care for Jesus' body. Normal practice. They would have done it the day before but that was the Sabbath so they couldn't.
- by the time the women arrived the stone was already rolled back
- Jesus' body was gone leaving the body wrapping cloths lying there where he had been lain
- they saw an angel (or two) who spoke to them
- the message was ..." don't look here for Jesus. He is not here. He is alive. Remember, he told you he would be raised. Go and tell the others."
- all gospels record their intense emotional response to this
- 3 of the gospels also say that Peter also came to look in the tomb and also saw the empty tomb but not the angels

That's all we hear about the tomb. They didn't set up church at the tomb. They didn't worship the empty space. That tomb got used for other people after that. The message of that day was the promise of encounter with the risen Jesus in the everyday places, when they didn't expect him ... back in Gallilee, up the mountain and by the lake, and in Jerusalem as they ate meals together ... this is where they found Jesus. The cross and the tomb stand forever as mighty symbols of God's power and action, but the early church walked away from

them, walking into mission, into worship and fellowship and service in the places where they lived, into all the world.

I guess for me what the stories of the empty tomb do, and why it is such a precious gift from those first witnesses and those they told their story to ... that we can share in their experience of utter shock and awe ... the empty tomb cleared the way for them to meet Jesus in entirely new ways. They had to learn to recognize him in new ways. The fact that his earthly body simply vapourised into thin air released them, releases us to meet the Lord of heaven and earth, who is still the man Jesus of Nazareth, as I said last month, still recognizable, still with his personality and values, still with his deep compassion, still a friend.

It is great that there is a basic agreement on enough of the story that we can be confident that it did really happen.

As for the different bits, the personal encounters ... Mary clinging to Jesus in the garden ... the women falling on their faces on the rock ... Peter and John peering into the dark out of the bright morning sun and trying desperately to make sense of this ... these are precious gifts which open out and keep opening out for us.

At Friendship Centre last week someone had some beautiful cards that were gifts from someone who had traveled in Vietnam ... you opened them out and the most astonishing 3-D pictures emerged. Remember pop-out cards & books? What you expect to be flat suddenly is 3-dimensional and you hold it and marvel at it and wonder how it is done.

I invite you to sit some more with these stories. Read it and ask the Holy Spirit to open it out for you. And we do that by letting ourselves be drawn into the story, let it be us standing there, let the feelings be our own, let Jesus' words speak to you and your heart. Hear Jesus say your name.