

Sunday 4 April 2021 - Easter Day

Sermon Notes

Opening comments

- Alleluia. Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia.
- We hear a lot about directions of travel and roadmaps nowadays.
- Consider two alternative approaches to direction of travel: onwards and upwards or round and round in circles.
- In terms of the pandemic we badly want to go onwards and upwards, and to do so soon, but so far we seem to have gone round and round in circles from one lockdown to another.
- Or as Sarah Brush suggested in her LL Excited by Creation, the pattern of development in trees is a fairly predictable long-term trajectory, interrupted by seasonal annual cycles.
- But let's see how we might apply this to our lives this Easter, based on Mark's Gospel.

Today's Bible Reading - Mark 16:1-8

- What does Mark tell us in his brief final chapter?
- Worth noting that the 8 verses we heard read a moment ago are universally agreed to be all that Mark wrote. Further verses 9-20 in some older Bibles are later additions.
- So why did Mark finish where he did and what can we learn from him?
- A great thing about Mark is that he doesn't smooth things over - he sets down the tradition he received.
- And in these verses he presents them and us with five surprises.
- The women walking towards the tomb wondered who would move the stone over the entrance for them.
- First surprise - the stone already moved away.
- Second surprise - young man in white, sitting in the tomb.
- Third surprise - tells them Jesus has been raised.
- Fourth surprise - Jesus' corpse is missing.
- Fifth surprise - report to the disciples and Peter that Jesus will meet them in Galilee.
- Any wonder they fled from tomb in terror and amazement? Any wonder they said nothing to anyone, because of fear?
- Final verse always a bit odd - probably means 'they told no-one except the disciples' cf the leper in Mk 1:44.

Why does Mark decide this is all we need to know?

- Clue is in instruction for disciples to meet Jesus in Galilee - where his ministry started and most of it took place.
- A case of going round and round in circles?
- No because going back, the disciples aren't starting again at the beginning; take with them all they've learned and been transformed by, especially about Jesus' death and resurrection.

- The same for our lockdowns - they seem the same but actually each time we've known more about Covid - treatments, vaccinations etc.
- So the disciples and we not going round and round in the same old circles - the circles keep getting bigger.
- For disciples part of their preparation for life without Jesus actually there, and for the coming of the Holy Spirit.
- For us in pandemic we are learning how to move on to more normality, and fewer restrictions.
- For us as Christians the open-endedness of Mark's Gospel forces us to put ourselves into the continuing story.
- May be our 20th, 50th or 90th Easter. Never too late to build on all the previous ones, with our new experiences of God's grace and love.

Reprise of direction of travel

- So is our direction of travel onwards and upwards or round and round in circles?
- Turns out it should be both.
- Onwards and upwards with our eyes fixed on Jesus, that great pioneer of our faith (Hebrews 12:2).
- Also going round and round, not in the same old circles, but in circles of ever-increasing size as we put all our experiences in the hands of the one who gave his life for us and was raised to life again on the first Easter Day.
- Alleluia. Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia.