

Mark 16:1-20
Feilding Baptist
1.5.22

Call to Worship

Frightened disciples hiding away, wondering what was going to happen next? To their amazement Jesus appears to them. And they change. Suddenly they have a boldness and recklessness to tell people about Jesus. This didn't go down too well in Jerusalem. We read in Acts 5 that they were thrown into jail while the high council thought about what to do with them. But during the night, an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and let them out. Instead of taking off, they went back to the temple and kept telling people about Jesus. They were brought before the high council where they were told to stop talking about Jesus.

Acts 5

[22 But on arriving at the jail, the officers did not find them there. So they went back and reported, 23 'We found the jail securely locked, with the guards standing at the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside.' 24 On hearing this report, the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests were at a loss, wondering what this might lead to.

25 Then someone came and said, 'Look! The men you put in jail are standing in the temple courts teaching the people.' 26 At that, the captain went with his officers and brought the apostles. They did not use force, because they feared that the people would stone them.

27 The apostles were brought in and made to appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. 28 'We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name,' he said. 'Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood.']

29 Peter and the other apostles replied: 'We must obey God rather than human beings! 30 The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead - whom you killed by hanging him on a cross. 31 God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Saviour that he might bring Israel to repentance and forgive their sins. 32 We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.'

Father of our ancestors, thank you for raising Jesus from the dead. Thank you for honouring Him and exalting him to Your right hand. Thank you for the forgiveness of sin that you offer us, and for the opportunity to seek your forgiveness, and show repentance. Thank you for the Holy Spirit, poured out for those who obey, and who believe. Please strengthen our belief and our faith as we worship this morning. Holy Spirit please come, please speak to us. Please encourage us. Amen.

Message - Seeing is Believing

Our belief in Jesus is supposed to change how we live.

We are offered Jesus to believe in, an alive God who knows us intimately. What an offer!

It seems that as humans we need something to believe in.

And if it's not God, we find other things.

The Old Testament is helpful in showing us what these things can be. While we might not relate to the exact things from back then, we should recognise the futility, or stupidity of this drift from God. This should cause us to think. Only God is able to fulfil us. Because our God is alive!

One thing that is a bit uncomfortable about the Old Testament, is the mirror it provides of us. Take Jeremiah 10 (NLT) for example;

1 Hear the word that the Lord speaks to you, O Israel! 2 This is what the Lord says:

"Do not act like the other nations,
who try to read their future in the stars.
Do not be afraid of their predictions,
even though other nations are terrified by them.
3 Their ways are futile and foolish.

They cut down a tree, and a craftsman carves an idol.
4 They decorate it with gold and silver
and then fasten it securely with hammer and nails
so it won't fall over.

5 Their gods are like
helpless scarecrows in a cucumber field!
They cannot speak,
and they need to be carried because they cannot walk.
Do not be afraid of such gods,
for they can neither harm you nor do you any good."

Their gods are like scarecrows in a cucumber field! Brilliant! What a waste of time scarecrows are in cucumber fields. Birds aren't that stupid! They won't touch those tasteless things!

Don't create idols from things that we make. Don't try to determine the future from the stars. Don't be afraid of dead idols. We have a God who is alive. Trust in Him. Believe in Him. Believe in Jesus.

Let's read

Mark 16 New International Version - UK
Jesus has risen

1 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.

9 When Jesus rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had driven seven demons. 10 She went and told those who had been with him and who were mourning and weeping. 11 When they heard that Jesus was alive and that she had seen him, they did not believe it.

12 Afterwards Jesus appeared in a different form to two of them while they were walking in the country. 13 These returned and reported it to the rest; but they did not believe them either.

14 Later Jesus appeared to the Eleven as they were eating; he rebuked them for their lack of faith and their stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen him after he had risen.

15 He said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. 16 Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. 17 And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; 18 they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on people who are ill, and they will get well.'

19 After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God. 20 Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it.

May God bless these words to our hearts and minds.

Well, having given the women pretty big raps last week, here they are this week, just like everyone else, with no expectation that Jesus was risen. They go to the tomb not to see the risen Jesus, but to anoint a dead body. They know where to go, because they've seen which tomb Joseph and Nicodemus put Jesus' body.

So it's shock upon shock as they see the stone rolled away, and find an angel inside the tomb. Matthew, Luke and John help us to know what had happened, there was an earthquake and an angel moved the large stone, back up the ramp.

The angel's words are comforting, don't be alarmed, you are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified, and has now risen! The sight and the words clearly too startling to be comprehended. We know from the other gospels, that Jesus' grave clothes were still there.

So it is hardly surprising, that the women left trembling and bewildered.

It gets a bit messy here, as the women are said to have said nothing. And when we create a harmony of events with Matthew, Luke and John, there are pieces of the jigsaw still missing. If you're wanting to find fault, you can. If you want to accept that each writer is writing from their perspective, how they saw and recalled these events, then it's fine.

Now, how many people have read the book 'The Power of One'? It's was one of the best books I'd ever read until I got to the last chapter. The last chapter just didn't fit the rest of what is a brilliant story. And I remember finishing it feeling let down.

A few years later I was reading another of Bryce Courtenay's books (April Fool's Day), this time a true story about the death of his son. As his son's life was ebbing away, Bryce was finishing writing the 'Power of One'. His publisher, with the empathy of a gnat, put pressure on Bryce to finish the book, instead of giving him a break. So he rushed it. When his mind was elsewhere. Such a shame. A perfectly good reason why the last chapter doesn't fit.

The finish in Mark is a bit like this. The earliest writings from Mark finish at verse eight. It's too abrupt, too sudden. As one commentator notes, the last Greek word isn't a word that you finish with. Something is going on here. Perhaps Mark's last few lines have been lost?

Newer writings have been found, and we now have verses nine to 20. They don't read like Mark's writing. As I said, it's a bit messy. But they are part of our Bible, so we should have a look at them.

Instead of the women staying silent, they now speak, but v11, no one believes. Then the two guys from the road to Emmaus turn up and tell how they saw Jesus, but the disciples don't believe them either. Whoever wrote this - rather, what God is saying to us, is will we believe? Jesus is risen! Will we accept this? Will we believe? This is the point!

Sunday July 20th 1969 is when two men landed on the moon. It was Monday 21st here in New Zealand. The news was broadcast around the globe. And it was big news, because the United States had won the gold medal. There had been a space race. And the West didn't want Russia to win.

However, some believed this moon landing was a jack up. A clever Hollywood con. No one went to the moon at all. And even today, some don't believe.

A bit like the earth being round. The Greeks in 323BC declared that the earth was round. Magellan sailed around it in 1519 to prove it. We've seen the photos from space, oh that's right, it was a jack up! We believe that it's round. Don't we? You can't sail off the edge? Can you?

I remember being at Ashburton Intermediate when we heard that the Japanese had invented a thing called the video cassette recorder. You could record the tv in your own home! It was unbelievable! The only unbelievable thing today is convincing young people that you can record tv onto one of those old cassettes!

Struggling to believe, isn't new. It's a human condition. We should test what we believe. We should want to be sure. Weigh the evidence. Intelligently. Like Lee Strobel. This investigative journalist wanted to convince people that Jesus was a fraud. He wrote a book about how he studied Jesus. It's in the foyer. Help yourself. It's free! A movie was also made of his search.

Strobel got to the point where he had all the evidence, and it was pointing in a direction he didn't want. He didn't want to believe in Jesus. But the evidence said differently. And the movie portrays so well the agony he went through of having to admit, that he was wrong, that Jesus did exist. 'The Case for Christ' is the book.

In the case of the disciples, Jesus appeared to them. And seeing was believing. How do we know that they believed? These frightened disciples suddenly became fearless. Remember Acts 5 at the start of our service. And they fearlessly did what Jesus commanded in v15. They did go into all the world and preach the gospel, this good news about Jesus. This good news that darkness does not have the final say. That Jesus is alive. That God has won. That we can be on the winning side. We can be saved, if we believe.

Oh, it says, whoever believes and is baptised. What does this mean? Can you be saved if you're not baptised? Yes. The guy on the cross was. So what is meant here?

Perhaps we should look at the baptism Jesus talks about in Mark 10:38? That fits here. Jesus talks about His baptism being the cross. Being prepared to do hard stuff. There's also something about baptism expressing what you believe. It's about living out what you believe. I was going to say a public declaration of faith, which is what we say of baptism here. But no. It's more than that. It's a show of repentance. A different way of living. Like the disciples. They lived differently when they were sure Jesus was alive. Baptism must never be a legalistic thing, a box to tick.

Baptism is about a fresh start, it is a declaration, it is a new way of living. So yes, by going through the waters of baptism here, is so fitting. We are saying that we live for God, not for ourselves. And that's not easy to do. Ah, but that's why we have the Holy Spirit to help us.

Which is what verse 17 is all about. There will be signs that show that you've got it, understood this, see verse 17. You'll drive out demons, not be harmed by poison, pick up snakes... Clearly we have to go to Australia!

Here again is evidence of Jesus' victory over evil, over darkness, over death. Remember Jesus is King! Now we too with the Holy Spirit can bring light into dark places, overcoming evil and darkness. This is the image of demons that we can drive out. We speak in new tongues as we are enabled by the Holy Spirit. We can do things that we never would have believed, because of the Holy Spirit's enabling, even do dangerous stuff that could cost us our lives, like picking up snakes. While we might drink poison, evil will not win! God has won the victory! Everlasting life cannot be taken from us.

And again we will bring light into dark places by healing the sick, and the broken, that is physically, as well as damaged relationships. God will work through us. For good. And v18, they will get well. What a massive privilege!

Believing has an action element. Faith is a verb, it's something we act out, live out. We are to be agents of Jesus in the world.

As we come to the end of Mark, we're called to look at the evidence, and make a decision. What will we believe in? Will we believe in Jesus? Has Mark made it clear enough? Has Mark given enough evidence? For me he has. What about you?

Our risen Lord Jesus, our alive Lord Jesus, thank you. Thank you for caring about us. Thank you for bringing light, breaking the power of darkness. Thank you for the fulfilment you offer, when we believe in you. Help us to declare our belief in all that we do, in how we live. May our baptism be more than an event, but something about each day.

Lord Jesus, we come to this remembrance meal, this Communion time to give thanks, to remember what has been done for us. Holy Spirit, please help us to be thankful today, help us with our belief. Amen.