

LIPHOOK & LINFORD METHODIST CHURCHES
SUNDAY 5 APRIL 2015, 10am & 6.30pm
EASTER DAY

Readings: 1 Corinthians 15:1-11; Mark 16:1-8.

Pause

What happens if I say nothing?

Answer – Nothing!

Not until you get fed up and go home.

How you feel about that might vary. Some of you might be relieved to get home earlier than you were expecting. Others might be disappointed – it might be a bit of a let down that what you were expecting didn't happen.

I suppose you might tell people that the service was very unusual but it's a all a bit unsatisfactory. The results of saying nothing are that no one gets anywhere fast (except home).

... the women ... said nothing to anyone ...

Where does that get anyone?

If that had continued to be the case I don't suppose we'd be here.

It's not very satisfactory but the earliest copies of Mark's gospel end at that point. We don't know what happened to it; maybe the end of the scroll got burned or torn and there was something more which may have recorded some of what we can read in Matthew, Luke or John or the alternative endings that have been added in the rest of Mark 16.

Mark's gospel in the earliest forms we have it ends with uncertainty and fear and silence.

Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

But that can't be the end of the story.

Let's look at that passage a bit more closely.

Mark tells us that there were three women that morning – Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome (the same three as he told us were there when Jesus died and saw where he was buried). They were the first to hear that Jesus had been raised from the dead and they heard from a young man dressed in a white robe.

This was not someone they knew well; not even someone they knew a bit; not even someone they hardly knew. This was a complete stranger – and someone who looked strange!

Other accounts say he was an angel so there may have been more to it than a white robe. Whatever the scene it was unexpected, it was alarming and the news that he had risen caused them to run away in fear.

Those women went to a burial ground expecting to find someone who had been dead for a bit under 48 hours. Their difficulty as they approached was not whether they would find him but whether they'd be able to get to him because of the weight of the stone across the entrance to the tomb.

So what they found was not what they expected. As they approached, they saw that the stone had been rolled away so they approached with

some anxiety and fear at what they might find. I don't suppose they'd formulated any revised expectations in that time. A young man in white sitting where Jesus' body had been was not one of the possibilities going through their minds.

So this strange looking stranger was equally unexpected. That's two major surprises and it's still not properly light.

The only thing that's not surprising is that they didn't really take in what was happening. I think when Mark reports that they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed. It's one of those biblical understatements.

They were alarmed. They were terrified more like.

So when he makes quite a long speech with a number of instructions it's not surprising that they don't go away and immediately follow everything to the letter.

They could see he wasn't there; they could see that the place where they laid him was empty. And they probably didn't hear much more than the instruction to go. I don't suppose they needed any repetition of that and probably didn't stay to hear where they were meant to go or what they were meant to do or say or find when they got there.

So they said nothing. On Maundy Thursday night I was thinking about when we let people down and when Jesus' disciples let him down. This looks like another point at which those he's chosen let him down because they don't do what they're told; they act out of fear and a sense of self-preservation rather than out of faith and a sense of obedience.

But let's not be too hard on them 'cause I think we might have been the same.

The news that Jesus has risen from a complete stranger, under 48 hours after he so publicly and horribly died is not easy to take in. The whole situation was alarming to say the least.

I don't know about you but I think I'd find it had to take the news of a Jesus' resurrection completely without warning from a complete stranger without all the rest of it.

So this is unsatisfactory. As we know, because we've read other accounts and because we've heard it every year for many years, there is more than this early morning fear-filled encounter with a strange young man in white.

Let's thank God for that.

Without more, without the appearance of the risen Jesus there's not enough. Not enough for my faith, I suspect not enough for yours and certainly there was not enough for those three frightened women on that first Easter morning.

Fortunately we are sufficiently removed from that moment in that garden outside that tomb that we are not filled with fear at the news that Jesus is risen.

I suspect we are also sufficiently removed from the first time we heard that Jesus had risen that we can't quite remember how we felt about it then.

Perhaps not afraid, or even alarmed. But fear does creep in for many of us when we hear two words from those instructions:

go, tell

suddenly we can identify with those who went away after hearing that instruction and said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

But we're a bit removed from the alarming situation of a garden in the half light of morning with a young man in white who shines brighter than the day in place of the body of their friend.

We can stop and hear the rest of what they were told:

'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. ⁷But go, tell his disciples and Peter, "He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you."'

So did you get that?

Don't be alarmed.

That's a good start. This is not alarming, this is not something to be afraid of.

Yes, if we're looking for Jesus - as people do who come to churches - we're in the right place. He was crucified, he was dead; but now he is risen, he is alive.

The young man pointed to the best evidence he had – an empty stone shelf in the tomb where Jesus' body had been. There is evidence. They haven't got to go with nothing to report.

Neither have we. Fortunately we have more because we can read the other accounts. We can read not only of the emptiness of the tomb but also the report that it was not empty – the body was missing but the grave clothes were left behind. And we can read the evidence of his appearance to one, two, a few and many people.

Do not be alarmed when he says
go, tell

But also don't be alarmed because of where he tells you to go.

"He is going ahead of you into –

Galilee.

There you will see him, just as he told you."

Where's your Galilee?

Galilee for them was home, familiar territory, not the big city with the authorities on every corner looking to come down hard on any sign of trouble – especially if it was anything to do with Jesus of Nazareth. Galilee was home, Galilee was where their work was based, Galilee was where their family lived, Galilee was where they knew everyone.

So Galilee was where people would hear the news not from a stranger but from friends and relatives.

Where's your Galilee?

That's not only where you get to share this news of a risen Jesus, someone who has overcome death, an event that points to life and hope for all because even death could not hold him.

That's the news to share but your Galilee is not only where you get to do that. Your Galilee – home, your family and friends, your work place, your community, the place where you are not threatened – your Galilee is also where you will see him.

It is where you are called – perhaps better where you are sent – it is where you are sent to tell that you will find he has already been, you will find he is there to meet you and you will see him already at work.

So come looking for him here. And I hope in some way you find him. But also go – go back to your Galilee and you'll find he's been there ahead of you and meets you there. Do not be alarmed.

Do not be alarmed but echo St Paul to the Corinthians because he summed up what we go to tell:

Christ died ... he was buried, ... he was raised on the third day ... he appeared to Peter, ... the Twelve, ... more than five hundred ... at the same time, ... he appeared to James, ... to all the apostles, ...

And when you think about how you found that he had been there ahead of you you'll also be able to say with St Paul that last of all he appeared to me also,

As Paul puts it later in that chapter, if Christ is not raised our faith is in vain. So, again and because we are not afraid, we are not in that garden on that morning we can say with conviction:

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Amen.