

We Must Tell the Good News By Paul Turner

These eight verses (Mark 16:1-8) changed the history of the world. If the resurrection, God's greatest miracle, is eclipsed by any other event in history, it's the miracle of Gospel -- telling the story of the resurrection. These eight verses created Gospel for the first time. We've been telling the news, living the news, and rejoicing in the news ever since.

How it must have delighted Mark to have the first news of the resurrection revealed to women. Unlikely leads for this drama, they came, too weak in strength to open the stone doorway, so weak in faith they expected to anoint a lifeless body inside. The same women who had followed Jesus throughout his ministry in Galilee, who had stayed close to him during the passion (15:40-47), now fulfill their purpose to the end.

Still, as close as they were to the Son of Man, they were ill-prepared for what they saw and heard.

First they see that the stone has already been rolled back. Since Mark let us overhear their conversation on the way to the tomb, we knew that the stone was large and all the women put together still could not budge it. So the rolled-back stone provides the first clue that something superhuman has happened here.

Then they see a young man in white. This image of freshness and purity prepares us to hear something brand new. Mark has already told us the event takes place early in the morning on the first day of the week. Even the temporal reference prepares us for a new beginning.

The women hear a prophecy. The young man has read their minds. He knows whom they've come to seek. Note how he identifies Jesus: the Nazarean, the crucified. Mark wants us to know that Jesus had a reputation, a home town, and that he died a violent death. These details provide the contrast for the big news the Gospel has been waiting to announce: "He has been raised; he is not here!"

Mark wants to convey evidence of the resurrection. The young man invites the women to look around, to see that Jesus is gone. They hear the assurance that he is alive and in the lead, going on to Galilee as he promised (14:28). There his disciples will see him. The role of this text is to proclaim that Jesus is dead and the body is gone. The role of his appearances will be to show what the absent body means; namely, life after death belongs to God, who invites us to follow.

The news goes on. The young man invites the women to go and tell it, to become the first preachers, apostles who will bear witness to the resurrection. Apostles, if you will, to the apostles.

All this news is meant to surprise the reader -- one breathtaking disclosure after another, leaving us bug-eyed and gasping at a report too good to be true. Then as if that's not enough, Mark throws us a curve ball. Read the last sentence. The women "fled from the tomb for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid." Huh? Turn the page. Nothing more. The end. What?

Mark's ending is so abrupt that later writers patched it up with a more positive message -- that women did proclaim the message to Peter, that Jesus did appear, that he appeared several times, and then ascended into heaven. There. That's a much better ending, right?

The problem is, Mark probably didn't write it that way. He ends the Gospel the way we hear it on Easter Sunday, with the biggest surprise of them all: After all this, the followers of Christ were still afraid.

What has Mark done? He has tossed the Gospel into the reader's lap. Have we been moved by what we've read? Do we believe that Jesus is the Son of God? Do we believe in the resurrection? Then, what are we going to do about it? We must tell the good news. We must proclaim the Gospel. We must celebrate this grand festival, which gives life its fullest meaning.

Christians still gather for worship on the first day of the week. We keep Sunday holy because that's when the resurrection happened and we believe it has made all the difference, so much difference that we keep gathering as a community Sunday after Sunday to hear the news and tell the news again and again.

We Christians, we change the history of the world.