

Dear Friends,

Mark 16: 1-6

Jesus had an inner circle of three men, Peter, James and John. They had not been able to watch with Jesus when he was filled with anguish as he prayed in Gethsemane. When he was arrested, they deserted him and ran away. Peter, three times denied that he had anything to do with Jesus, he denied that he was his friend.

In contrast to these three men, in Mark's gospel, we are given three women who at three key moments do all they can to stay close to Jesus. It's not totally clear that it's the same women each time, but it's possible. They are Mary Magdalene, another Mary and Salome. They keep watch while Jesus is being crucified. They are only able to look on from a distance, but in Mark's gospel, they are nearer than anyone else. Two of them watch as the body of Jesus is laid in a tomb which is sealed with a heavy stone. Then, when the sabbath is over they go to anoint the body with spices or perfumed ointments.

While Jesus was being crucified darkness covered everything. For these women it's still dark. It is dark in their hearts. They are suffering the darkness of grief. Actually, the sun has risen, but they don't yet know it. They soon will.

They remember the huge stone that was used to seal the tomb. It took so many people to get it in place. They are strong, but they know that they won't be able to move it by themselves. They keep going anyway. They realise that they are wasting their time, but they have a little hope that something might turn up.

And lo and behold it does. They look and see that the huge stone has already been rolled away. They go into the tomb. They see a young man dressed in white. It's an angel, one of God's messengers. They are terrified.

He says, what God always says when humans come face to face with the presence or activity of God. He says, "Do not be afraid". He goes on, "You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look there is the place where they laid him".

These three women are given the good news that God has raised Jesus from the dead. Then, they are invited to join in with God's resurrection work. The angel says "go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you".

He says, "Tell his disciples and Peter". These friends are still in the dark. They are suffering the darkness of guilt as they feel stung by their sense of shame because of the way they deserted Jesus and denied that they belonged to him. They feel hopeless, because if Jesus was still alive, he would be getting rid of them and replacing them with new and better friends. They feel devastated and empty. Peter feels this particularly. He said that he would never deny Jesus, that he would die for

Jesus. But when the moment came, he chose instead to save his own skin. When he realised what he had done, he broke down and wept. He is filled with disappointment about himself. He has realised that he is just not as good as he thought. He has let Jesus down.

Jesus however is understanding and forgiving. He said that he would be struck and his friends would be scattered. But that was not all that he said. If only they had been listening, they would also have heard him say that he would be raised and he would go before them to Galilee. He was telling them that they were going to fall, but that would not be the end for them. Jesus would not be ashamed of them as they were ashamed of him. He would still be there for them. They would still be his friends. He would still lead them.

God bless you,

Tony