

April 5.2015 “Simple Details” Mark 16:1-8

Most of us are old enough to remember black and white television, one channel, and a weekly slate of programmes which did not include any choices other than on or off. To watch or go play scrabble in another room. My family did not have scrabble, and once the television went on you were not permitted to turn on the radio. In that era one of my favourite programmes was Dragnet. Detective Friday, played by Jack Webb became famous for the oft repeated line. “Gimme the facts. Just the facts. And I guess that is why I have a tendency to turn on Easter morning to the Gospel of Mark. Mark gives me the facts about the resurrection of Jesus. The basic facts.

Don't misunderstand me. It is singularly not true, and only poor scholarship suggests it is, that the other gospel writers embellish the facts with fantasy or legend. Matthew, Luke and John are also factual in what they tell us about what happened. And the facts are, even in their accounts pretty simple. They want us to know what they saw. They want us to know this is not second hand information. They were eye witnesses, and when they were not eye witnesses, they are telling us what they learned from people who were. The details are pretty simple.

So again, why turn to Mark? There is little doubt Mark's is the oldest of the Gospels. There are scholars who make an eloquent and detailed case for the fact that it was probably written, and I mean the final draft...between 2 to 4 years following the events of the crucifixion and the resurrection. And you will notice, in our pew Bibles there is a note that “verses 9-20 are missing in the earliest manuscripts and ancient witnesses.” Dr. Gary Habermas, who did his doctoral dissertation on the Resurrection, went on to

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write 7 books on the subject, resulting in an honorary Doctorate from Emmanuel College, Oxford, England, Dr. Habermas said this about verses 9-20. “Not all scholars believe Mark ends at verse 8. But even if it did.. “You still have Mark reporting that the tomb is empty, and a young man proclaims “He is risen”, and telling the women that there will be appearances of the risen Lord.”

The details begin with the matter of time. It is the first day of

the week...crucifixion and burial on Friday, Sabbath (the 7th day of the week begins at sundown on the Friday and runs through to sundown on Saturday. 1st day of the week on the Jewish calendar is Sunday. And here we are. Here we are on Easter Sunday, the anniversary of the resurrection of Jesus. One of the details is that so profound was the experience for those who were there....they were all Jews who knew the meaning of Sabbath or Shabbat....they changed their practice to worshipping on the 1st day of the week because it is the day of Resurrection.

And here we are 20 centuries later (they were in the 1st one, 1 plus 20 is 21)...here we are 20 centuries later worshipping on the 1st day of the week, Sunday. No matter what town or city you are in in any part of the world you can go looking for church services on Sunday and you will find them. Why? Because it was on the first day of the week that the women went to the tomb with their very own agenda...to anoint Jesus body in the tomb...and they found it empty. And a young man dressed in white who proclaimed to them, as I proclaim to you...Jesus rose from the dead on the 3rd day. He is risen. He is alive. He is with us. He is Lord.

Even those churches who plan for worship opportunities at other times of the week, have services on Sunday. The 1st day of the week. Every time we worship we pay homage to the fact of the resurrection of Jesus in terms of when it happened.

And speaking of when, early in the morning. In the case of these women it was just after sunrise. We have our own unique reasons for worshipping later in the morning, but here is the fact there are few if any churches who plan to have their primary worship service in the afternoon or the evening. The exceptions are those who rent space in existing church facilities and therefore must accept alternate times because the morning hour is already taken by the congregation that owns the building. In Canada we tend to recognize 11:00 am became the time of choice because of the chores on the farm, especially the milking of the cows. Only in multiple charges usually with more than 2 points did they plan for the primary service at one of them in another part of the day.

Sunday in the morning is when the news was announced. He is Risen. Christians have been worshipping on Sundays in the morning ever since. A 21 century habit? No...21 centuries of conviction that there is one day that is the right day, and one part of that day that is the right part. We confess our faith in the resurrected Lord everytime we do this and do it together. Simple Details! Profound truth at the hand of God.

The women were sharp. They were going to the tomb to annoint Jesus body. Even as they went they talked about the problem of the Stone. The stone, and you will see this next week when Barbara and I will take the time of the sermon to show you photographs from our trip to Israel. One of them is of a tomb like the one in which Jesus body was placed. You will see the wheel like nature of this carved, stone door that runs in a groove. It was a

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sloping groove. Which means that when it was wedged shut with another piece of stone it would be very hard to open again. In their case the women faced that additional problem that it was sealed with the seal of the Procurator of Judea, and therefore there is a legal problem about breaking the seal. The women recognized their work was going to be cut out for them. They were not sure they could solve that one. Devotion and love and grief and loss drove them to try.

What Mark is telling us is that it was a surprise to everyone that the stone had been rolled away. And it was an even greater surprise that there was no body in the tomb. Here is one of those really profound details that most critics of the Christian faith simply overlook. There is no one who was alive in that area at the time, who asked the question is the tomb really empty? To the women it came as the surprise of the day. To the disciples who were told by the women that the tomb was empty, it was again the surprise of the day. The Sanhedrin which had pushed Pilate into crucifying Jesus did not dispute the tomb was empty. They did make a deal with the soldiers about what to say if they were asked about it. But that was because they knew the tomb was empty.

All of the Gospel writers are in agreement the women were the ones who made this marvelous discovery. The stone is rolled away, and the body of Jesus is gone. The reason I described what happened on the

Friday in such detail is this. No one who has lost more than 50 percent of their blood supply by volume, whose back to their calves has been reduced bloody wounds that may have even exposed bone, whose shoulders have both been pulled out of joint by the ordeal and the engineering of the cross, could have removed the stone and gone running off, leaving not a trace or a

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trail. It's ludicrous to suggest. And the disciples by their own admission were in hiding laying low. The portrait of the women in Mark, Matthew, Luke and John is that they are the devoted ones who feel a duty to at least see the remains are treated as they ought to be in Jewish community.

One simply cannot leave the story of the resurrection of Jesus without saying this about the women. Their inclusion in the story at all is extraordinary. The women were on the lowest rung of the social ladder in 1st century Judea. There are rabbinical saying which include these words. "Let the words of the Torah be burned rather than delivered to a woman." Women had no standing in a Jewish court of law. If the disciples were going to promote themselves as the leaders of the fledgling church, they would never have thought a good strategy to promote their cause was to make it plain they had no part in the discovery that the tomb was empty and the Lord was risen. That that discovery was made by women.

The women no doubt saw things differently than men. Jesus defended them. He talked to them about God's love, He taught them the Scriptures along with the men. And Jesus often embarrassed men who tried to destroy women, by one means or another. And here they are, part of the simple details that declare the truth on Easter morning...He is risen.

There are those who would raise the point that Easter is not a Biblical word. It is not here in Mark or any other Gospel. And they are absolutely right! Always remember, the word Easter is an Anglo Saxon word swoester. It means springtime. Which of course was the time of and is the time of the Passover, when Jesus was crucified and rose again on the 3rd day and the time of the year when

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all of the churches celebrate that He is Risen. King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

The truth is these are the facts...such simple details...which thrill us with hope.

Let us pray...