

The Resurrection of Our Lord, Gospel, Year B

WHERE IS THIS JESUS, WHOM YOU DECLARE RISEN?

Mark 16:1-8

Resurrection of our Lord

Analysis by Fred Niedner

When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. 2 And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. 3 They had been saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" 4 When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. 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 But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. 7 But 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." 8 So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

DIAGNOSIS: Missing and Dissing all the Clues

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): We Should Have Known

He told us precisely what to expect, but we couldn't hear it, bear it, or believe it. Three times on the way to Jerusalem Jesus said the same thing, that the Son of Man would undergo rejection and great suffering, be killed, and after three days rise again. We suspected he must be talking about himself, but

are we sure? Who exactly is “the Son of Man?” Perhaps he’s talking about someone else, we let ourselves think. Then just the other night, after the Passover Seder, he said it again, but we missed the part about him rising, and going before us to Galilee. Or at least the guys, who were the only ones with him that night, must have missed it, because they didn’t tell us women. Perhaps they missed it because first he said, “You will all become deserters, just as the scriptures say, ‘I will strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered.’” The guys, we now know, went straight into denial mode. Especially Rocky, who, in the spirit of hypothetical heroism, boasted, “I will never desert or deny you, even if I must die with you.” In the end, our people got so caught up in convincing themselves of their own loyalty and courage, they paid no attention to the promise of resurrection or the post-resurrection rendezvous.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): In Truth, We Couldn’t Have Believed Even Had We Listened More Carefully

Truth be told, we never really believed he was going to suffer and die like that, despite what he said. We counted on God giving him, and the rest of us as well, our three-score years and ten, the fair share of years we all more or less deserve. Yes, we’ll all die, even him. And yes, a few sparrows always fall far too soon. So, if he really wanted to make our lives different, he’d have done something to keep any of us from dying, himself included. So we merely kept on keepin’ on, dodging disease one day, the bloody empire the next, all the while wondering what on earth he meant when he told us we’d need to pick up our own crosses, or even more strangely, told us he would rise again after the suffering he predicted for himself. Life and death we understand all too well. Life is fragile, death is certain. But rising again? We can’t believe it. And what could it possibly mean even if it came to pass?

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Scared to Death and

Hopelessly Dead

He's dead. It happened, just as he said. So are we. Although still breathing, we're the handmaids of death, and we know our roles as death's servants, the clean-up crew that arrives every time death wins—and it always wins—and finds ways to hide death and facilitate the final denial. We accept inevitability, anoint the dead, grieve over our loss, hate the death-dealing empire and all the creeps and traitors who played a role in this tragedy. If it's still possible to pray at all with these numb hearts, we can only pray as he did there on the cross, amid all the screams of pain and the hateful taunting, "My God, my God, why? You abandoned us, God. Is this all we are to you—bugs for the powerful to squish beneath their heels?"

In any case, we do have his body, broken as it is, and we shall finish anointing it now, a final honoring of one more fallen sparrow. If only someone will roll away the stone . . . What's that you say, young man? He's not here? He's "risen?" This doesn't make sense. What can it mean? And, "Go to Galilee, there you will see him, even as he told you?" More nonsense. When did he say that? We didn't hear it, and no one told us, and besides, Galilee is a big place. So we run, frightened and shaken to our cores by the chaos and nonsense that's descended on us. We flee not to Galilee, or anywhere in particular, but away. Just away. Away from Jerusalem, from the tomb, from each other, from the God whose world is a cruel, chaotic, obscene joke.

PROGNOSIS: Buried with Him, and Raised with Him, Too

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): From Handmaidens to Tombmates

We aren't the first to have run away frightened, been stripped naked by the graveyard's surprises, or had our tongues terror-tied. By now we know the executive committee, Peter, James and John no less, were terrified, struck dumb in the presence of

burial place escapees and the clothing they saw on the Transfiguration Mount. Then, when the arrest party arrived for Jesus in the grand graveyard known as the Mount of Olives, all the disciples forsook him and fled—and not because it was supertime. The young man at the tomb had his own moment of naked flight from that same cemetery. But the most grievously “whacked” of them all was, yes, him—Jesus. Lying on his face in Gethsemane’s dust, sorrowful unto death, Jesus pleaded, though he was plumb out of words until the Spirit prompted him, even as he’d told the disciples the Spirit would do for them. “‘Abba, Father, thy will be done.’ Now’s the time to use that one,” said the Spirit. So he did. And later, after more dreadful silence, the Spirit whispered again, this time in song, “My God, my God, why . . .?”

And now we know, too, that the young man presently wearing that white robe spent the whole weekend with Jesus, with the naked one on the cross who’d had only the Spirit’s borrowed words to say. The young man had been buried with him by baptism into his death, and now he is raised with him to new life (whatever that is), wearing the robe of the newly baptized, still speaking gift words, not his own words but words taught him in secret by those who’d been through all this before him. “He is risen, and even as he told you, he’s gone ahead to Galilee.” But all of us are always and only followers of the one who went first into the darkness, the yawning emptiness of God-forsakenness, and the silence of the tomb. Even there, he is Lord for us. And that means everything to us.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Running, but Finding our Voices

Yes, we ran away that day, afraid, saying nothing to anyone (and thereby creating headaches for at least two millennia among those who have beat their heads against the ending of Mark’s version of the good news, his sermon-trying-to-be-heard). But as

you likely presumed, yes, we did eventually go tell the disciples, and Peter (who was busy muzzling every rooster in and around Jerusalem), what the young man said, and what we now believed. And what did we believe? We saw the tomb. We knew it was empty. In the end, we had to trust the young man's promise that we would see him, so we took off running, chased by the Spirit no doubt, and thanks to the Spirit no doubt, not just running, but hoping, believing, trusting.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Risen Ones, on the Loose in Galilee and Beyond

We went where he told us, to Galilee. There we saw him, in flesh and blood, sitting in a desolate graveyard and speaking with a man so unclean he slept with corpses and dined with swine. Lo and behold, when we all left together, all of us came away clean and whole. The same thing happened when that woman with the unclean blood flow dared to touch us, and then we touched her, and we went on together, all of us clean, and from there we went to Jairus' house. Surely by now you've heard what happened there. By the end of the day, there were no more tears, except a few of the joyful kind. We rejoiced and sang together, the whole body of Christ that's on the loose these days in Galilee (and everywhere else). "There are no dead folks here," we declare to one another and all who will listen. "We are risen!"

"We are risen indeed, Alleluia!"