

Easter Day 8 April 2102
Rev David Howells

Grace Church in Scarborough

This is the first Easter for Grace Church, and we are hoping the next one will be in the new location at 700 Kennedy Road.

But what will it be like?

We do not know. We worry or we hope, but we do not know. I worry a lot. I seem often to be steering this ship of faith and I worry that I do not have enough answers. Grace Church seems so small in the vastness of Scarborough. Anglicanism is having a hard time of things. Our world is changing fast and we do not have certainty about the future. How will it all work out?

Mark, the Gospel writer was afraid too, perhaps with better reason.

Around 40 years after Jesus, the Romans finally lost patience with the Jewish leadership and demolished their temple and slaughtered a vast number of their people. Where was the God of Israel?

Christianity in Mark's time was still overwhelmingly a Jewish sub-group. These were mostly Jews who saw Jesus as the Jewish Messiah. Being Jewish was becoming dangerous in an Empire which stated that the Emperor was a god. The heart of Judaism is that there is One God, and one only.

Mark was afraid also because he was a Christian. The Jewish authorities continued to persecute Christians. They needed to regain control and get Judaism back together. This "Christian Heresy" was an irritating, ongoing bug.

The Empire also disliked new and unstable religions. People who believed too much were less likely to be influenced by greed or fear. Christians held that there was no King but God, and that their authority was in the gifts of the Holy Spirit. They were "anarchists" in many ways, "communists" in others.

Mark was afraid and so were all the faithful in his community. It was not for the whole church through the centuries that Mark thought he was writing. He was getting things down on paper before the first hand memories were lost through time. He was writing it for his own church. He was writing it also *to* his own church.

When you read Mark's Gospel it is full of conflict and urgency. "And immediately..." is a repeated phrase. And it ends in silence and fear. The first witnesses of the resurrection said nothing because they were afraid. And that is where Mark left it. Another ending was tacked on later when the Gospel left that community and "went viral" through the church! It needed a new end to make sense. But for Mark's people the fear and the silence resonated with their reality.

They could not see the future any more than the women in the Gospel could. They were faced by an impossibility.

It was impossible for the two Marys that Jesus could be alive. They had watched him die. They had buried him. No matter what they were told or saw it was too hard! For Mark's church the future was unseeable. The Jewish nation wanted them dead and the Roman Empire had a violent reaction to new religions. How could an organization of a few thousand face an enemy of millions and of great power? It was too hard.

So Mark's Gospel, (which is the Word of God to the whole Church) with its silence and fear, comes to you, as it did to its first readers, and quietly asks

"What are you afraid of?"

"What is too hard for you?"

"What is God asking you to do, or to be, that you think is beyond hope?"

Is Grace Church too hard to commit to?

Is the work and the newness and the difficulty of it not being "like church has always been" too much letting go for your soul to endure?

Maybe it is something in your work

Maybe something going on in your family

Maybe it is the facing of age, illness and death

What are you afraid of, and of which you will not even talk?

Mark left the silence and the fear as his last words because he knew, as did his church, that this was not the end of the story.

Jesus did rise!

Jesus did appear to his friends and followers.

Jesus did not leave them comfortless or alone but returned to them in the Holy Spirit and gave them words of fire and gifts beyond comprehension.

Mark did not have to point this out to them because they knew the story already, as do we.

Mark left the next few pages blank, as it were, because he knows that is what God does with us.

God does not reveal how things will turn out, how the hurdles will be overcome, the dread and fear washed away or how the pain in your heart will find healing.

God does not tell us.

God says, "Remember Holy Week and Pentecost. You know the story. This is what I will do with you, O you of little faith! I will not leave you comfortless. I will give you my peace, such as the world cannot give. Do not worry about tomorrow, or run after the things of this world. I know you need them. Just trust that I am the God of Resurrection. I bring life out of death and light out of darkness. Darkness and death are mine now. In Jesus I won them. They hold no terror if you will trust in me.

Mark could not tell his church what to do. As I cannot tell you. But his intentionally unwritten conclusion is your walk with God. You have to write what happens to your fear and silence. Do you live in the belief of the resurrecting God of new life? And everything changes? Do you say, "It is too hard." and stay in fear and silence?

May you choose life, and light, and hope and peace. For today we say.....

Christ is Risen.

He is Risen in deed, Alleluia