

What Now?

Women were last at the cross; now they are first at Jesus' tomb. The news of the Resurrection fills them with "terror and amazement." How can anyone take in such amazing, alarming news? What will happen now? Later, the disciples proclaim the story of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. This Easter Day we join them, and rejoice in God's saving work.

Focus Scripture: Mark 16:1-8

When the Sabbath ends, the women who had remained at the cross (Mark 15:40-41, 47) go to the market to buy spices. Though their hopes in Jesus seem to have ended, they still plan to prepare Jesus' body for burial, wrapping it in cloths with spices to mask the odour of death. Early on the first day of the week, the women go to the tomb, worried about how they will roll away the heavy stone sealing the opening of the cave-like tomb. To their surprise, the stone has been rolled back.

A young man robed in white – an angelic being – tells them that Jesus is not there, but has been raised. The women are alarmed and amazed in the presence of this mystery. Perhaps they are filled with "terror and amazement" because they *do* understand that, from now on, life will be utterly changed.

The young man says that Jesus is going before them – as a shepherd leads a flock – into Galilee, the place where his ministry began (Mark 1:14). Here Jesus first called people to follow him into living in God's reign, to form a new community.

The original manuscripts of Mark end abruptly at Mark 16:8. The verses found after this in some Bibles are thought to be a later addition. Mark's gospel throughout imparts a sense of urgency and brevity. Right from the beginning, we hear that the time is short, that the need to respond to Jesus' message is urgent. A new story begins now. The disciples must return to the place of call and begin to live out the meaning of the gospel as they have learned it from Jesus. Speaking to the ending of Mark, biblical scholar N. T. Wright says that perhaps we are being invited to complete the story ourselves – to take our understanding of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus and live out that story in our own lives.

John 20:1-18, the alternate gospel reading, provides another resurrection account. Mary Magdalene comes alone to the tomb, followed later by Peter and John. There is no angelic messenger, but Mary encounters Jesus in the garden. Full of joy, she returns to tell the disciples the good news: Mary is the first messenger of the Resurrection.

Mark's account ends by reporting the women "said nothing to anyone," yet news of the Resurrection spreads. In **Acts 10:34-43**, Peter's sermon summarizes the story of Jesus' life and work. The resurrection story has transformed Peter and the others into a strong community with a message to share. Those who witnessed Jesus' life and ministry are called to proclaim that he is the one sent by God to bring forgiveness of sins and new life to Gentiles and Jews alike. Paul, in **1 Corinthians 15:1-11**, also summarizes the Christian message – Christ died for our sins and rose from the dead. Paul did not witness these things, but God's grace has come to him, as it comes to us today.

Isaiah 25:6-9 continues the theme of God's love for all people. All are called to God's banquet. God has saved us, and we rejoice. **Psalms 118:1-2, 14-24** gives praise and thanks to God for victory. God acts to save, and does not give us over to death. Christians have used this psalm, with its messianic images of the opening of the temple gate, to give thanks for our salvation in Christ, the chief cornerstone.

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The astonishing news of the Resurrection transformed Jesus' followers into courageous preachers of the good news of Jesus Christ. How do you understand the message of Easter? What is the challenge for you in responding to this message?

April 12, 2009

Focus Scripture

Mark 16:1-8

Additional Scriptures

Acts 10:34-43 or Isaiah
25:6-9

Psalms 118:1-2, 14-24

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

John 20:1-18

Alleluia! We praise you, O God, for Christ has conquered death! Make all things new in our lives this day. Dwell in us, that we may proclaim to the world the good news of Easter Day. Amen.

If you have Internet access, visit www.spiritseasons.com to access Spirit Sightings for connections between current events and the focus passage.

