

SUNDAY CIRCLE: THE RESURRECTION IN THE GOSPEL OF MARK

Raymond Brown; one of the first books about how the Gospels came into being, including the Christmas 'story' and the Passions, that I experienced was "The Community of the Beloved Disciple" by Raymond Brown, SS. Raymond Brown, 1928-98, actually taught at St. Mary's seminary in Baltimore and later at Union Theological Seminary in NYC. His tome about John's Gospel when I read it years ago in HK, was fascinating, challenging and eye opening. It is in this same stream of narrative commentary, that Frances Maloney, SDB, has written 'The Resurrection of the Messiah', the text from which this material is taken.

- I. We don't really know the names of the Gospelers, of the 4 Gospels we include in our canon. There were no names included in the earliest manuscripts, and not until the 2nd century were the names of Mark, Matthew, Luke and John given.**
- II. Within the overall story of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ witnessed in the Gospel accounts, the account of the Passion, the death of Jesus is always the climax of all that goes before. And it opens the door to the Resurrection story.**
- III. It is important to realize that no passage in the Gospels stands alone, there are always words and passages that precede , and generally words and passages that follow. In the case of the Resurrection narratives, that transition is met by Luke's Acts of the Apostles.**
- IV. Mark's whole Gospel looks forward to the Passion account, and can't be understood without it. His Gospel has been described as 'a Passion story with a long introduction'.**
- V. The Passion of Jesus is focused on what happened to Jesus. The Resurrection narratives are focused on 'what happened to the original disciples.' GOD's entering into the mystery of Jesus' death and burial is crucial for Christians to appreciate what happens to Jesus.
Jesus' death is not for himself, as we note in the Eucharistic language of the Last Supper, "my body broken for you" "my blood shed/poured out for many". But also in the**

Resurrection stories, it is not just the disciples that are the focus, but again, GOD's action in and thru Jesus and in the disciples.

- VI. Mark's Passion story has 11 scenes. 14:1-15:42. There are really two sections, the interplay between Jesus, and his disciples, between the Jewish leaders and Jesus, between Jesus and the crowds.

One of the themes with regard to the disciples is the theme of failure. Despite the center and climax of the Last Supper, there is the arrest in Gethsemane, the fleeing of the disciples including the young man without clothing traditionally depicted as Mark, Peter's denial, the absence of the male disciples at the Cross. Jesus predicts their failure, their fear and flight, yet tells them he will go before them into Galilee and they will see him. (14:27-28).

- VII. The second section of the Passion introduces other characters and Jesus, the Romans and Pilate, the crowd, the Jewish leaders. There are repeated ironic proclamations of who Jesus really is: The Jewish leaders call him blasphemer for his acceptance as the Messiah, God's Son; Pilate asks 'Are you the King of the Jews', the plaque on the Cross proclaims him.
- VIII. The Christological high point of the Gospel arrives as Jesus abandoned he feels by God, dies in agony on the Cross, and that moment in his death, the Holiest of Holies, the sanctuary of the Temple is split open for all to see. The new Temple, Jesus is proclaimed by the Roman centurion, who has witnessed Christ's death: "Truly, this man Jesus is the Son of God."

Looking at Mark's Account of the Resurrection

1. There is the clear time change, from 'It was the day of Preparation,' 15:42 – 16:1a, 'and when the Sabbath had passed.'
2. The women: the same women named as present at the Crucifixion, were also named as present for the Resurrection:

Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of James (Virgin Mary), Salome, watched Jesus die, and had seen where the body was laid.

3. Mark's final page is told in 3 steps: the setting: The empty tomb, The Easter proclamation by the angel "The angel spoke to the women. You must not be afraid, he said, I know you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, he has been raised, come here and see the place where he was lying. Go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from death and now he is going ahead of you, he is going to Galilee and there you will see him.'"
4. The women are AFRAID and yet FILLED WITH JOY, then Jesus appears to them, 'Do not be afraid,' they hold his feet, then He says, "Go tell my brothers".
Here it appears 16:8 that the WOMEN FAIL. THEY DO NOT GO TO TELL THE DISCIPLES WHAT THEY HAVE SEEN AND HEARD.
5. Many scholars who have dealt with the issue of Mark's original and secondary endings agree this may be the original ending since it seems controversial to assume a 'page was lost' or a manuscript glitch occurred. These difficulties and ponderings are clear in the earliest days of Christian tradition. The later versions add a more satisfactory ending, one in line with the other Gospel accounts of the women.
6. The theological issue raised by Mark's abrupt and nebulous ending is: Did the women NOT go to Jerusalem and tell the male disciples Jesus has been raised? In which case the faltering relationship between Jesus and his male followers is not restored.
7. Looking at the details of the Resurrection story in Mark: Joseph of Arimathea buried Jesus on the day of the Crucifixion without the normal anointing of the body and spicing. Some critics say that after 36 hours, the women would not be coming to anoint and lay spices since by that time the body unembalmed would have already significantly decomposed. Unlike the other Gospels, Mark suggests that the women came more in respect to honor Jesus at his gravesite.

8. The issue of the stone: the women are wondering how they can move the stone, the three women cited would not physically be able to move a large stone. But in Mark's Gospel, again, it is GOD who moves the stone, only God could. (4a) The language of the passage tells that the women RAISED their eyes and could SEE the stone moved, a theological directive to know this is the work of God.
9. In the center narrative, there are three stages:
- The description of the young man/angel in the tomb,
 - The women's reaction, fear and strong amazement 'amazed out of themselves'.
 - The young man, GOD's messenger, God himself announces what has happened to Jesus. His message is a TRANSFORMATIVE message, illustrating the POWER of GOD.
10. The whole passage is set up to show that God HAS ACTED even before the women appear. "Human experience and expectation even failure, have been transcended by the action of God". Our human question: Why was Jesus abandoned on the Cross? Is answered: He is not, was not. On the Cross even He is Messiah, King of Israel, Son of God. The apparent failure of Jesus on the Cross has been reversed by the definitive action of GOD, He has been raised. The empty tomb is Jesus' victory.
11. It is a victory that moves into the future. "He IS going before you into Galilee as he told you, you WILL SEE him." 14:28
12. Understanding the 'failure of the women'. Mark's Gospel could leave us with this impression – the male disciples ran away, or denied. Now the women fail to tell the Resurrection news of Jesus raised. However, the other Gospel Resurrection narratives plainly state the women did see and were the first witnesses of the Resurrection to the disciples. Early Christian communities witness to this in the Gospel of Matthew, 28:1-10, Luke 24:1-12, and John 20:1-3. All of these accounts testify to the existence of a body of tradition that plainly has the women going to witness at the tomb, and reporting the Resurrection to

the disciples, the discouraged and fearful male disciples. Even Paul suggests this in 1 Cor. 15:3-8.

13. Commentaries suggest that Mark in fact was using a kind of Pauline technique, that Mark wants the initiative in this Resurrection narrative to stay with GOD's action, not human beings. Mark's action is on **WHAT JESUS SAID WOULD HAPPEN, DID HAPPEN!**
14. The answer to Mark's ending, where the women 'fail' lies in the very existence of the Christian community, where the story of Jesus **IS** being preached to the whole world, where there are believers and converts. The witness to the male disciples is not necessary because **THE BELIEVING COMMUNITY HAS THE WORD ITSELF, JESUS HAS BEEN RAISED!** If the promise of Jesus in Mark's Gospel to go before them into Galilee and they would see him has **NOT** been true, the Christian community would not exist and be heard.
15. Secondly, it is possible that Mark felt that the action of the women in proclaiming the Resurrection to the male disciples was so well known and attested it was not necessary to announce the success of the women. This might also address the 'gender wars' we have been noticing.