

EYES AND EARS

April 1, 2018

Easter

[Mark 16:1-15](#)

[Acts 10:39-42](#)

(prayer)

Two days ago, on good friday, I preached that there was value in not moving too quickly onto the next chapter of the story.

So, forgive me that I want to start today with a quote from *next week's* gospel reading: "**Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe**". (Jn20:29)

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In the book of Acts, we heard Peter proclaim what he believes about Jesus to the household of Cornelius - a centurian of the roman cohort stationed in Caesarea. Unlike, Peter and his compatriots, Cornelius was not jewish... although the text implies that he was respectful of the traditions and practices of the local population.

Peter justifies his belief in Jesus as The Messiah, by reporting on his first person experiences of Jesus. Peter says that he was a witness *to all that Jesus did in Judea and Jerusalem*. Peter tells Cornelius that he was a witness to Jesus' execution by crucifixion. And Peter claims to have witness Jesus resurrected... *we ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead*.

Peter knows that Jesus Is Risen because he saw it with his own eyes. He claims to have directly heard the risen christ tell him to preach that *Jesus is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead*.

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I also read Mark 16, verses 9-15 that recounts a series of other stories about direct experiences of resurrection: Jesus walking with two travelers on a country road, although he didn't look like Jesus to them. And... Jesus appearing to Mary Magdalene, but not being believed by others until he appeared before their eyes too while they were eating supper.

This part of Mark's gospel seems to be re-telling (in summary form) stories that are told in greater detail in other gospels;

- Luke 24 is where we find the story of Jesus walking with two disciples on the road to Emmaus. They don't recognize him until later that evening when he breaks the bread around the dinner table.
- John 20 is where find the story of Jesus appearing to Mary by the tomb; she runs back and tells the others that she has seen the Lord, but it is not clear that they believe her until Jesus appears to them later in the day.
- Luke 24 and John 21 both have stories of the risen Jesus eating food with the disciples (presumably as proof that he was physically with them and not just a ghost or spirit).

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I intentionally broke up the reading from Mark today... stopping the reading from chapter 16 at verse 8 at our opening words this morning.

In fact, the Lectionary didn't even include the second half (verses 9-15) as a suggested reading.

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Mark is generally presumed to be first of the biblical gospels to be written (early 70s... about five

years before Matthew and Luke came along and a couple of decades ahead of John).

If you look at most modern publications of the bible, there will likely be some notes at the end of Mark that lets you know that the oldest manuscripts end at verse eight: *So [the women] went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.*

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It appears that Mark's gospel did not originally include accounts of disciples experiencing the resurrection with their eyes... instead they experienced the resurrection only with their ears.

This choice was not appreciated by later gospel writers... both Matthew and Luke (who used Mark as their base text) added more explicit resurrection appearances. And, eventually (perhaps in the early second century), someone inserted an [appendix](#) to Mark's version.

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Even at its most hopeful, in the New Testament, the number of people who had a **physical** encounter with Jesus (risen from the dead) is a very select group. And... in virtually every case, the first reaction to hearing someone else claim to have *seen the Lord* is skeptical disbelief:

- Luke 24:11 - But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.
- Luke 24:21-24 - It we had hoped that Jesus was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.
- Matthew 28:17 - When they saw Jesus, they worshipped him; but some doubted.
- John 20:25 - The other disciples told Thomas, 'We have seen the Lord.' But he said to them, 'Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.'
- Mark 16:8 - So the women went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

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If *seeing* Jesus on Easter morning was a requirement for belief, there would never have been a sustainable christian movement.

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We are here because, the resurrection of Jesus is not a feast for the eyes... it is a feast for the ears.

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We are not eyewitness reporters of an irrefutable series of events; we are guardians of an unbelievable story.

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Is testimony enough?

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It is going to have to be.

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Let us pray:
ad lib

offering