

The Gospel of Mark tells the resurrection story so differently than the other Gospel accounts. In the account Tracie just read, there is decidedly something missing – the appearance of the risen Lord. And verse 8 is where the earliest manuscript of Mark's Gospel ends. Instead of Jesus appearing to those who followed Him, accounts of which were later added to Mark, what we have is the three faithful women going to the tomb – not only because it was women's work to anoint the body, but also because the frightened and faithless men had all gone into hiding. When they got to the tomb, they didn't see the risen Lord, they didn't see a herald angel making a glorious announcement of the resurrection. Instead, they saw the mysterious young man in white who made a simple statement that Jesus had risen as he said he would and had gone on to Galilee to meet the disciples.

Why does the story end this way? Why don't we get a picture of the women seeing Christ and running excitedly down the road hollering, "He is risen! He is risen! The Lord is risen indeed!" Maybe it was important for the author of Mark's Gospel to leave the story here. Maybe we're not just talking about how the story is told, we're also talking about taking it on faith.

Remember Mark's Gospel was the first one written. In the time between Jesus' resurrection and the writing of Mark's account, the Roman's still occupied

the country and there was a great deal of persecution going on. So Mark's message to the new Christians would have to be expressed in a certain way; a way that would most effectively reach the ears of the uninitiated, who might be scared away from accepting the new Christian sect. The hearers of this story were threatened with death for who they were, just as Jesus was. So maybe Mark felt that they had to be approached in a certain way.

Imagine if you will Mark standing in a room full of new Christians; a house church. And he's telling them the story of the passion, the crucifixion, the death of Jesus. Then when he gets to the part about what happened three days later, the version we just heard is what he tells. Then he sits down. Don't you think the uninitiated would have been sitting there – elbows on knees, mouths agape – saying, "But what happened then? Did they see the risen Lord?" And Mark's response, "It doesn't matter whether or not they saw Him. He was alive. He IS alive today, and that's all there is."

A few years ago, I saw an ABC news show in which they interviewed Dr. James Tabor, who is a New Testament scholar and social scientist at the University of North Carolina, Charlotte. His book, The Jesus Dynasty was the subject of the interview. During the course of the show, Dr. Tabor professed his Christian belief. He then went on to say that he didn't believe in the virgin birth and he thought there were two messiahs – Jesus and John the Baptist, as he said, "Operating at the

same time.” Those statements were problematic for me, but they didn’t really set me off. It was when Dr. Tabor said that he counted himself as Christian and then said he did NOT believe in the resurrection, that I was both angered and saddened. Let me just say this as plainly and succinctly as I possibly can – there are few absolutes in the world, but one of them is: If you don’t believe in the resurrection of Christ, you cannot be a Christian! You may be a good person, a spiritually strong person, a person who tries to carry out the teachings of the human Jesus, but you are most assuredly NOT a Christian.

Dr. Tabor talked about not believing in the first century possibility of bodily resuscitation. Who cares? What happened on that first Easter morning, what Mark wanted his audience to pay rapt attention to, was not the resuscitation of a dead body; it was the resurrection of the Son of God. This is not a matter of history it is a matter of faith, plain and simple. It is this faith that Dr. Tabor lacks and for that lack, I feel sorry for him. If the resurrection was about history, there would be historically provable evidence that it happened. But do you know what the best evidence of the resurrection is? It is the Christian church. If Jesus of Nazareth had died and his body had been moved by his disciples, how long would his story have been told? But the resurrection is central to our FAITH. We Believe in it and because of that belief, that faith, certain things in our lives are true.

First, as William Barclay says in his writings, Jesus is not just a figure in a book or some long-dead person in history. Instead, Jesus is the living Christ – the resurrected Lord.

Second, Jesus is not just in our memories, He LIVES with us and in us. No matter how important an event or person is to us, over time our memories of them fade. The same would be true of Jesus. Unless He is a living presence, over time his memory would have faded, and it has not. Jesus is not some memorialized person we discuss, rather He is someone we MEET.

As Barclay puts it, “The Christian life is not the life of a person who knows about Jesus, but the life of one who KNOWS JESUS.” There is all the difference in the world between knowing about someone and knowing someone. I know a great deal about the President of the United States, but I have never met the man. Dr. James Tabor knows a great deal about Jesus, but somehow I don’t think he has ever MET Jesus.

One other thing that makes Mark’s telling of the resurrection different from the others, and a thing that I think might have been of ultimate importance to those new first century Christians is that the young man in white tells the women, “Go. Tell Peter and the disciples.” No resurrection appearance could have had more impact on the disciples – especially Peter – than these words must have. Peter had denied Him. The disciples had all forsaken Him. And yet, his words to the women

were, “Go. Tell them that Jesus goes to meet them.” Even to those whose faith has been shaken to its core, to those who have perhaps quit believing in him altogether, He still stays faithful, loving and ALIVE. Even to Dr. Tabor, Jesus is, today sending us out with the message, “Go. Tell everyone that Jesus is resurrected, just as He said. And He is coming to meet you.”

For the early Christians, and for us, the way the story is told can make a difference. But we have to have faith to meet the risen Lord.

Amen.