

Notes on Mark 16 : 1 – 8 ‘Jesus Christ is risen today’

Last week a new ‘Banksy’ appeared in Islington, North London, and it is a delightful tree mural. What is clever about it, which all Banksys are, is that in the foreground of the painting there is a living tree which looks dead and behind it is the dead paint used to make the tree look alive. When this Banksy was discovered, the place was filled with genuine excitement and awe and wonder that Banksy had chosen to paint it there in their neighbourhood, though some did wonder if the only outcome of this would be their rents going up!! One of the Banksy trademarks is that his paintings turn up where you would least expect them, whether it be Margate or the many paintings on the wall dividing Israeli from Palestinian and when we read the Easter Story, we discover it to be a story of unexpected appearances animated by unexpected questions. The heart of the Easter Story is not for it to be a fact we coldly explain but a mystery we immerse ourselves into and when we do that we discover that our lives have not only been turned upside down but that we’re part of the story too.

I’ve just read a collection of World War Two short stories where each has a twist in the tail. The delight of this sort of story is that it makes you stop in your tracks with surprise, though to be fair, some of these twists are better than others. This is exactly how the Gospels tell the Easter story. It starts with Jesus being dead, of the women going to the tomb to anoint this dead body and their conversation being dominated by one simple question – ‘Who will move the stone?’ All is panning out as you’d expect when suddenly the twist in the tale happens, but the peculiar thing is, is that it’s not at the end of the story but in the middle at verse 4. This is either an appalling style, since the twist is in the wrong place, or else it is sheer genius when we meet the young man dressed in white who is just sitting there waiting for them, waiting for us, to come into the tomb. This angel, as this is who he is, acts as the interpreter to help these women, and us, to understand what today is about and the only question we need to ask is, are you sitting comfortably?

Three times Jesus had told his friends that he would suffer, die and be raised again from the dead (in chapters 8 verse 31, 9 verse 31 and 10 verses 33-34). When Jesus says this, he is describing how he will fulfil the purpose behind his ministry which is built on texts such as Isaiah chapter 53, Deuteronomy chapters 26 – 30 and Psalm 22, to name just a few. These texts help us to understand how we can ourselves enter in and live out the story which both our baptistry and Easter eggs describe when they speak of us becoming a new person, of a life washed clean from sin, of our being set free from bad ways and instead immersed into God’s love. They

also speak of our knowing the power of the resurrection in our life today, of our being filled with the Holy Spirit, of our being part of God's new creation and being repurposed by a new story and vocation.

Like all great stories, this story has a what? It has a twist, and the second twist is in verse 8 where we read of the women being overwhelmed, astonished and afraid as they try to get their heads and hearts around all that they have seen and heard. Of the body gone, an angel sitting there, his message to go and tell the other disciples and the resurrection happening at the wrong time; resurrection was always something which happened of at the end of time and not here and now.

This twist includes us too. The story pleads with us to be not just a spectator who merely looks on, remote from what you are hear and see. This pool and our Easter eggs speak of a God who has his arms open wide inviting each of us to enter into this story of being made clean, of being set free, of being immersed in God's love, of knowing the power of the resurrection in your life today, of being filled with the Holy Spirit, of being part of God's new creation and our lives being repurposed by a new story and vocation. Will you jump into the vastness of this Easter story? Will you immerse yourself in it freely and gladly as Jack and Josh will be immersed in this pool? This is truly life changing and it is a life lived no longer in the dark but in the light. It is a life no longer shaped by fear or anxiety but by love. It is a life no longer lived far from God but closer than you can ever imagine. Don't say no to Jesus, say yes and live life as we were always meant to do.