# If You Hurry You May Catch Up with the Risen Christ

1When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. 2And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. 3They had been saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?” 4When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. 5As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. 6But he said to them, “Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. 7But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.” 8So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid. (Mark 16:1-8)

It’s daybreak in Jerusalem. Women are coming in from the villages around, with their bundles of herbs and eggs and produce to sell near the city gate. You can still see them nowadays, dignified women, inscrutable. Behind their reserved faces you wonder what is going on inside their heads and hearts (they are victims of political intransigence on the part of Palestinian and Israeli men, and that is part of the story).

This daybreak there are also three women leaving Jerusalem. They are women of reserve, too, women of dignity and inner pain. They are grieving for a man they all loved, a dead messiah. They are going to anoint his body. They are still coming to terms with the idea of him being dead, and perhaps they want to go and look at his body, to tell it that they cared. They are confused, and half-way there they realize that they will not be able to get into the tomb because of the boulder in front of it.

## Good Friday in people’s lives

It’s Easter Sunday, but it’s not Easter Sunday in their lives yet. Spring, when the days get lighter and the trees bud, is a peak time for commit­ting suicide. What the calendar says and what nature says conflict with what is happening inside people; they cannot bear the difference.

There was a South American Indian tribe that was exploited and oppressed by the govern­ment and by business and by industry. At Easter they observed only Holy Week, not Easter Day. It wasn’t real for them. We are not expected to jolly such people out of that feeling, though we may look for the way God may want to bring Easter reality to them.

One Good Friday a Christian woman came to see me because she was being assaulted by her husband. She was trying to make their marriage work in a civilized way and to bring their children up hap­pily, but he would turn on her, although she felt she was trying so hard. “And there’s no justice,” I remember her saying, with a Good Friday anguish. It had not changed much for her by Easter Day. It can still be Good Friday for us, when the cal­endar says Easter Day. At least we can be with people in their Good Friday.

The two Marys and Salome discover something suggesting that Good Friday has passed. The boulder has moved. Inside the tomb is a young man in a white suit looking as pleased as Punch, brushing flicks of rock dust from his sleeves: “How about that then?” (“All right, what do you do for an encore?”) He has pushed the stone away. He didn’t do that to let Jesus out. He left a while ago. He did it to let people in, to see that Jesus has gone, to let witnesses see that the tomb is empty.

“No-one’s stolen the body,” the lad says. “That’s where he lay down, but he’s got up, he’s gone back to Galilee. He’ll see you there. Bye!” And (whoosh) the young man is gone.

Jesus and his friends were never really at home in Jerusalem. Jesus had work to do there, but now he has done it, and he is back north. Galilee wasn’t quieter; it was busier in its way, more multi-ethnic, than Jerusalem. It wasn’t safer; people had tried to kill Jesus *there,* Jerusalem just happened to be the place where they succeeded. It wasn’t merely that Galilee was home; home was where they had *first* rejected him. Urban, multi-ethnic, unfash­ionable, needy, hard Galilee was where God had first sent Jesus to preach and work signs of God’s reign. So that is where he is off to. He will see them there, if they want to join him in his mission to that ordinary world.

## Always off somewhere unpredictable

Jesus had gone off somewhere else just when he seemed bound to stay in one place. He is so unpredictable. He’s always missing from where you thought you could find him and present somewhere different from what you thought you had a right to expect. He promises to be somewhere, and when you get there you find that he *was* there but has now moved on again.

The women were prepared to face up to the fact that Jesus had become a corpse. They were not hiding from reality like the men. They were prepared to adjust, to begin living in the light of reality and loss, of pain and disappointment. Then they find that he is not there, the young man in the white suit says he is alive, and they are invited to go and tell the men, and Peter, and to begin hoping again.

“Tell the disciples *and Peter.*”Does Peter still count as a disciple? He was the man who fell asleep in Gethsemane, then disowned Jesus, then kept well away from the cross. Does he still count as a disciple? People who have done things that make them wonder whether they still count as disciples are invited to put their own name in the sentence. “Tell the disciples and . . . John (or whoever it is) that I will see them in Galilee.”

“So the women were thrilled to bits and ran to tell the disciples.” No they didn’t actually, Mark tells us. At the beginning of the story they are grieving and hurt, at the end they are trembling and bewil­dered, they are running scared and not telling any­one anything. After all, imagine your business is about to fold. You are just get­ting used to the idea when someone says there is a miracle solution. Do you believe them, just like that, and rush out to tell the world? Aren’t you afraid, half-wishing they had not told you because you don’t know where you are again now, you don’t know what to believe? “It’s not the despair I can’t stand, it’s the hope.”

## Ourselves in the story

The women’s silence can’t be the end of this story, otherwise we wouldn’t know about it. Actually this is a wholly strange account of Jesus’ resurrection. Jesus is not even there. Perhaps that enables us to put ourselves into the story. We live our lives between an empty tomb and a Jesus who is already over the hori­zon, only a cloud of dust. *We* do not see Jesus being raised from the dead. We have the *evidence.* There is no corpse in the tomb. He is gone. But it happened before we got there. We didn’t see him.

Nor can we *see* Jesus with us now. We will see him when he appears at the End, but that is in the future. We may miss what he is doing or saying in the *present* because we are blind to it, like those dis­ciples. Mark says to us, “Open your eyes, get your walking boots on, Jesus is alive, he is off to work in the world, if you hurry you can catch up with him and join in. The Twelve Disciples are disillusioned and demoralized, they may not be there. Even the women are beside themselves with fear. Nobody will do it unless you and I do.”

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