

Sunday 11th April 2010.

BOB: Building Outreach Belonging x15.

6.30pm Communion Reflection.

Where does Mark's gospel end? (Mark 16: 9 – 20 and another old ending 9 – 10.)

Why did Jesus spend so much time eating with his Disciples after his resurrection?

(Matt 28: 16-20; Luke 24: 36 – 49; John 20: 19-23.)

Mark's Gospel really ends at chapter 16 v8 and this might seem a strange ending!? Surely this was not the intended ending? The Greek used is very different and also the ending is not present in any of the older more reliable manuscripts. How come? Maybe something happened to *Mark* himself or maybe the most original manuscript was damaged and a portion lost.

Mark 16: 1 – 8. Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome were the first at the tomb and the first witnesses of the Resurrection of Jesus – they are commissioned to go and tell the disciples and especially Peter the news. *Mark* tells us of their distress and terror. This was going to take some getting used to! No doubt this was the reason Jesus spent 40 days after his death appearing to them and teaching them (*Acts 1: 3 - 5*). *Mark's* Gospel seems to be the first account of Jesus' life and *Matthew & Luke* will have referred to it as far as we can tell.

Post resurrection appearances – Jesus seems to have picked the meal time to often reveal himself to his disciples. This was a context in which they recognised Jesus and his typical actions and a place and space when he encouraged his disciples to see what it meant to follow him. When Jesus met with Cleopas and the other disciple on the road and then turned in at Emmaus to eat with them *Luke* tells us that *they recognised him in the breaking of the bread.* (*Luke 24: 35*).

Here too in one of the alternative (some might say apocryphal) endings to *Mark's* Gospel (16: 14) *Last of all Jesus appeared to the eleven disciples as they were eating. He scolded them, because they did not have faith and because they were too stubborn to believe those who had seen him alive.* Jesus in this "later account" reproaches them for their disbelief and hardness of heart – it's as though to paraphrase he says, Shame on you for choosing not to believe even when your fellow disciples told you. There is no doubt that legally at this time the testimony of women would not have been considered as valid – but the disciples were forced to admit later that Peter also testified that he had been raised. (The Gospel writers begin themselves to sow the seeds of women's equal status in sharing the Good News of Jesus' resurrection so that by the day of Pentecost *Luke* continues his amazing accounts of Jesus and women into his writing the book of Acts and says – *Your sons and daughters....*

Matthew also mentions the doubt among the 11 and the commission of Jesus to go into the entire world. *Luke* mentions the doubt in their minds even when the 2 came back from Emmaus and also the terror on seeing what they thought was Jesus' ghost. He ate a piece of cooked fish in front of them so they were convinced of his bodily presence. *Luke* also records that they are to be witnesses of the historic events. *John*, however, speaks of the joy that was amongst them at seeing the Lord. *John* records the breakfast barbeque on the beach that Jesus invited them to and provided for.

Every time he ate with them following his resurrection no doubt Jesus was reinforcing the fact that he was not a ghost, a disembodied spirit – he had been raised from death. Also it was his regular practice to eat with them – and they recognised this. He didn't celebrate it as a religious ritual but as a fellowship meal and they would have remembered that *on the night of his betrayal* he had used the bread and wine to speak of what he was going to do. He also had said that *he would not drink the wine again* until he drank it after his crucifixion – *new in his kingdom*. He ate the Passover – the “Last Supper” before his death and resurrection but after his resurrection he ate with them many times. (Obviously he did not regard this as a waste of time or a second rate activity – even here Jesus was building a fellowship, a community of believers around himself who would spend time together & work together as well).

Many emotions were present in these days following the discovery of the empty tomb. The women were full of *distress and terror* (Mark 16: 8) and the men were full of *doubt, confusion, unbelief* – as well as the joy John mentioned. Jesus needed to shape this shocked, doubting, confused, even terrorised group of people into a people who could go into the entire world with the news of his Resurrection and the building of his Kingdom. No mean task for Jesus!

“We choose what we will believe in”????? Perhaps we choose what truths we will base our lives upon. Some people base their lives upon the belief that if they gain as much money, goods and property as they can they will be happy. Perhaps some base their lives on the belief if they are as super fit as they can be they will be fulfilled. We all believe in a variety of things and give various truths different values. Jesus was out to convince his disciples that he had risen bodily from the dead and therefore his claims to be bringing in the Kingdom of God were true. The disciples as time went on had to decide how much influence Jesus was going to have in their lives – especially once he ascended to heaven and disappeared from their daily view. Were they going to follow his instructions and go into the world with the message and were they going to base their lives on loving God and neighbour and being part of a community of love?

We say that we believe in a living Jesus and the test of how much we value Jesus will be in the way that we live and basically whether we obey his teaching in this generation. Why did Jesus spend so much time with his disciples eating with them and teaching them after his resurrection? Well of course he was repeatedly demonstrating that he was not a ghost but also I believe it was because he enjoyed being with them, wanted them to remember the distinctive way he broke bread, served others and called them to love and therefore serve one another.

We cannot escape that the Fellowship Meal – the Lord's Supper – rather than a ritualistic meal was the way Jesus chose to meet with his disciples both before and after his death and resurrection. Sometimes we may celebrate with a small piece of bread and small cup and other times our remembrance is within a bigger agape meal but whenever it becomes more of a ritual than a fellowship meal and remembrance we need to examine ourselves again so that we may eat it in the right way and with the right attitude. Jesus must be at the centre of our remembrance and recognition but we too must eat it loving and serving one another. Jesus eats with us to build a living community of faith (in him & his resurrection), love and service.