

## Feelings and Faith

The ending of Mark's Gospel is emotive – it tells us about strong feelings. The mourners are described as worrying about a big stone, alarmed at meeting an angel, and bewildered by what he says. The last verse of our reading sums it up: 'Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.' We might ask about their mental health.

Being real and open about our need for good mental health is something we've begun to address during this pandemic. This is because the pandemic has raised levels of anxiety, despair and depression. People have lost hope, agency and supportive relationships. Mark's Gospel is real about these deep feelings.

We might speculate and reflect on Mary Magdalene, who had gained so much from her relationship with Jesus and has now lost him. Salome, probably a rich person who may have financed the spices, had hoped Jesus would promote her sons. And for Mary the mother of James (possibly a distant relative of Jesus), this is a family tragedy. Their world has been turned upside-down and now upside-down again.

Feelings play a big part in our lives. Even if we think we're a rational or a practical person, it's often our feelings which drive us and shape us. Our feelings can sometimes reveal our underlying wellbeing. How significant are feelings for the way you respond to things or make decisions? How do you feel tonight?

## Mental Health & Jesus

If you were a mental health carer, you'd want to offer support to those who've been through a trauma like seeing Jesus' arrest, trial and crucifixion. But what would you make of the story about the big stone, the angel and the message that Jesus had risen from the dead and was soon going to meet everyone?

The relationship between our faith and the feelings which reveal our mental health is important. The good news of the resurrection does not necessarily take away our worries or our feelings. But trust in the person of the Risen Lord can provide a basis for resilience and for addressing our mental health.

Of course, given that faith is both an experience and more than an experience, we are all still on the journey of finding out how to live by trusting in Jesus. The good news of Mark's Gospel is that even if you're trembling and bewildered, and fearful of saying anything, Jesus is still there waiting for you.

For many of us who've worked through mental health issues, and most of us do at some point in our lives, the promise that the Risen Lord Jesus is waiting for us in Galilee can represent the rock, the hope against hope, we need. There is no darkness we've experienced that's deeper than what Jesus has gone through – and from which he's been raised to new life. With others we are all journeying to Galilee.

## Faith as Feeling

But let's be clear what the Gospel does tell us. The resurrection is not just a subjective experience; it's beyond our experience. It disturbs but includes the limits of our experience. So we're sometimes more willing to bury Jesus than trust in his Risen Person. It's less risky. Mental health grows as we're able to regain responsibility for ourselves. But it takes time to trust Jesus: to develop the feeling of faith in him.

So I don't believe that Mark's Gospel ends where our reading does. The majority of scholars think we've lost Mark's original ending. The other endings we do have are later additions. However, in some ways, not having the original ending is an opportunity for us to tell our story about learning to trust in the Risen Lord whose resurrection makes it possible to build up a faith-based resilience beyond trembling.

Yet some of us have lost the opportunity to make a contribution to wider life. The pandemic has hit our social life and economy very badly. We therefore have a national responsibility to create new chances for people. I believe Mary Magdalene, Salome and the mother of James were transformed. And so too are we. Our faith can be a strong force, resourcing us to make changes to our everyday life and work. We can witness to the reality of the Risen Lord in our lives. We can make a difference. As we come out of lockdown, let's work together, trusting in the Risen Lord to bring hope to our region and the nation.