

Sermon Notes

St Mark's Anglican Church
South Hurstville
Guest Preacher
The Revd Susanne Chambers
Parish Priest

St Mark – Patronal Festival
6 May 2007

Readings: Isaiah 62.6-12; Psalm 89.1-9; Ephesians 4.7-16; Mark 16.1-15

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40th Anniversary of Consecration 'Let the Resurrection out'

Thank you Chris Albany for inviting me to St Mark's for this special occasion of the consecration of this place...this sacred space!

Chris and Pam Albany and I go back over 20years, to the halcyon days of the beginnings of Movement for the Ordination Women (MOW) in Australia and for us, part of the first MOW in Perth WA. Last month I celebrated 20years of ordained ministry- 14 of those years as a Priest! I know that sounds incredible, particularly here in Sydney, and also sad...I am well aware of the continuing struggle for the church to recognise all people, men and women who have ministries which God has called them to, to use in varying roles. And so it is special when I 'come home' and be with you as part of the wider Anglican Church in Australia.

When I was thinking about what to speak with you, my first thoughts were about coming home and about the consecration of St Mark's church building which occurred 40years ago...when I was 11 years old!

Consecration means that something is set apart for the service of God. This space here in South Hurstville on this plot of land, has been set apart for the service of God. Now we know that a building can't actually do that! It is what we do *with* the building, what we do *in* the building that makes it, in my mind anyway –consecrated-set apart-sacred.

So in many ways, it is you- each of you who have been a part of this place, which you may call home, are set apart for the service of God! I will come back to this in a moment.

When I was telling people that I was coming to Sydney to preach, I would say, I am going to preach in my home church. It was the first place, this community of faith that nurtured me in the faith (besides my family home).

Each time I come 'home' here, things have changed. I have got older, you have got older!, the priests are different, I have come home to be married, I have come home to take the funeral of my nephew Matthew who died aged 12 for my brother John and his wife Debbie and brothers Michael and Hayden, I have come home to be with Mum for Dad's funeral, and when she moved out of the family home to move into Mary Andrews.

Home does not stay the same. And in many ways Thank God for that!

All these home comings for me have been deeply moving and have assisted me in my Christian journey. Life as you know is a journey...which goes on and on...and we make choices along the way as to which track to take...the story/the journey is without an ending in some ways...because we don't know what's around the corner.

It's one of the reasons I have become fond of the Gospel of Mark. I am sure you are aware that Mark's gospel doesn't have a satisfactory ending-it has a couple of endings...today we read the short ending which ended with the women afraid and then we went on to part of the long ending which gave us a more satisfactory ending with Jesus commissioning his disciples "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation!": even though they were still in disbelief!

Like the Women, on our journey we have choices to make...which track to take?
The writer of Mark's gospel is offering us a choice.

I was recently in Adelaide for a Chaplain's conference and our guest speaker was Reverend Dr Alan Cadwallader...a very fine theologian. And Alan unpacked some of the stories of Mark's gospel. And I was interested in what he said about the first ending of Mark. Let me go over the story briefly.

Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome went to anoint Jesus' body...they were wondering how they would move the stone...(I am surprised women hadn't thought of this before hand?) --They were grieving when they arrived at the tomb; - to their surprise the stone was already rolled away. They went inside the tomb and in there they saw a young man, dressed and sitting up and they were scared! (Who wouldn't be?) And as we hear time and again from Jesus and even from the prophets like Isaiah- 'do not be afraid, do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. If you don't believe me LOOK. There is the place they laid him...-he is not there...GO and tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.'

What did the women do?

They went outside the tomb and ran!!!! because 'terror and amazement had seized them; and the short ending of Mark leaves us with the women saying nothing to anyone ; for they were afraid.

These women had choices to make on their journey...which track to take?
It blew their minds what they saw and heard.

However these women did not keep quiet. When they stopped being afraid they began to talk and in a way let Resurrection out! We wouldn't have any of the gospel writings about the resurrection of Jesus if no one talked about it-if these women didn't talk about it! There would be no church! No communities of faith! No St Mark's South Hurstville! No St Thomas Upper Ferntree Gully!

These women took up the challenge of the young man. They looked back into the tomb...and then they went and then told what they saw, what they felt...they had chosen a path...to stay with Jesus...and Jesus stayed with them.

It's probably not surprising how thick the disciples were in believing in the resurrection of Jesus. The longer version of the ending of Mark tells us that he appeared to Mary Magdalene who did go and tell those who had been friends of Jesus but they did not believe. Then Mark tells us that two of them were walking in the country and saw Jesus and went back and told the others but they didn't believe them either..and then he appeared to 11 of them...and Jesus ticked them off for their lack of faith and stubbornness....but we are all the same...pretty thick... and yet we keep coming back to Jesus as they did...

This church building has been consecrated/set apart. It is what we do *with* the building, what we do *in* the building that makes it,-consecrated-set apart-sacred.

It is the same with scripture/our sacred text...it's what we do *with* the text and what we read *in* the text...that can make it come alive and sacred for us. We read the stories of Jesus...we read this story of the empty tomb and the women's response of fear...we can come to understand for ourselves that Jesus the Christ has risen! We know it because that small group of Jesus' followers told others...and they believed. For us to take it on, we have to recognise the resurrection story in the text. And then for resurrection to come alive it has to be from within the community...it occurs in the life of people...it is something of the present.

Can you think of the resurrections you have known in this place?

Each time I come home to St Marks I remember my roots, I remember different parts of my story with you and the different tracks I have taken over my life. Owen Thomas, the Rector here when I was a teenager, who prepared me for confirmation, may be quite surprised to see what I have done with my life! When I was young, I would sit in the pew, I was shy and would giggle a lot with the help of my twin sister, Kaye, because we were not sure of ourselves.

And yet, the one thing that I was sure about, although I couldn't articulate it then, was a very deep love/connection with God and a 'knowing' about Jesus. It has been over the years that I have had a number of homecomings with him, with Jesus, in that he has changed for me and I have changed probably because of him and we sit most of the time comfortably in lounge chairs (metaphorically speaking) still finding out about each other...so there is a sense of being at home with my God known through Jesus.

Mark's Gospel doesn't have a satisfactory ending. If we stay with the short version we are left with the women who are afraid...yet we know for the gospel to have been written, Jesus must have risen and the women must have told their story.

I leave you with a challenge...to think about your faith journey...your links with St Mark's, with your relationship not only with each other, but with Jesus. Is he still a word on the page of scripture or has he tapped you on the shoulder and said 'don't be afraid' now get on with being set apart to work for me.

It's good to be here with you today to celebrate this anniversary. Let's thank God for the women and men of this parish, who have not only 'seen and believed', but who have lived out the Resurrection, so that it has become a reality in this Community and beyond.

May we all, keep telling the story, and like the women 'Let the resurrection out'

Christ is Risen!

He is risen indeed! Alleluia!