

A sermon for Easter Sunday based on Mark 16:1-8 preached at Knox Church Dunedin New Zealand by Kerry Enright on 4 April 2021.

In the gospel we have heard today Mark seems to be applying words from the philosopher Soren Kierkegaard: "Some things are true when whispered but become false when shouted." Today, Mark whispers the news of what happened to Jesus on the third day after he was crucified. Mary and Mary and Salome come to the tomb to attend to the dead Jesus. They are worried about who would roll away the stone from the mouth of the tomb. But when they looked up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away. In the tomb was a young man who told them that the dead Jesus wasn't there – "He has been raised. He is not here. Go tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee and there you will see him, just as he told you. Terror and amazement seized them and they said nothing to anyone ... "

Later scribes became so worried by this ending that they added on stories of Jesus appearing to people. They wanted a polished end rather than a ragged one. They wanted more of a shout than a whisper. Scholars almost universally agree that verse 8 is the end of Mark. So Mark ends with "... and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid." A whisper. But what a whisper!

The young man told them he is to be found in Galilee. So at the end of the gospel, we are led back to its beginning, back to Galilee, back to where the disciples were called. But now we are to read it as disciples in the company of the risen Christ. As Tom Long says, " ... Where is the risen Christ? Precisely where he was the first time. Back at work, preaching, teaching, calling, healing, cleansing, feeding, challenging oppression, and casting out demons. We should look for the risen Christ, then, especially in places where people suffer, where there is defeat, pain, and loss. There is Christ, standing at the bedside of those on ventilators, standing at graveside with those who grieve."

In the earthiness of living, there resurrection is whispered as real and empowering and sustaining, giving hope again and again. Paul in his letter to Corinthians also emphasises the presence of Christ in the physicality of living. It isn't about the Gnosticism of theories or metaphors or universal principles – the risen Christ is known in the ordinary living of Galilee and Otepoti.

As the feminist theologian Elizabeth A. Johnson writes in her book, *Friends of God and Prophets*, "As the narratives of the Easter appearances make clear, henceforth [Jesus] is present through the power of the Spirit in word and sacrament, dwelling wherever two or three gather in his name, encountered as a stranger explaining the Scriptures as he walks along the road, recognized in the breaking of the bread, present where

human wounds are touched and healed and, in a special way, served where the hungry receive bread, the thirsty drink, and the naked clothing.”

Whispered but life-changing. Tom Long tells a story about the town in which he lived – Cambridge Maryland. In the long, hot summer of 1967, in the midst of civil disturbances across the nation and the stirrings of local racial unrest, a fire was set in the black elementary school. The all-white volunteer fire department refused to answer the call, and the school and several blocks of businesses were destroyed. The white-run banks wouldn't lend money to the black merchants to rebuild. The street still bears the mark of that fire. Even now the despairing lament “it would only have taken one fire truck” is heard among African Americans.

After the death of George Floyd, some artists in the African American community came up with an idea. They made a proposal to the City Council, which gave its unanimous approval. So, several artists brought rollers, brushes, and buckets of paint over to the area, where they were joined by white artists and ordinary citizens, black and white, and they painted a large “Black Lives Matter” mural down the centre of the Street. That was in June, last year.

Several weeks later, in the dead of the night, a pickup truck stopped in the middle of the deserted street and began burning rubber up-and down the new painting, defacing the art with cruel tire marks. The “Black Lives Matter” artwork was despoiled. When the police investigated, they discovered that a security camera on one of the stores had recorded the truck in action. It turned out to be a distinctive-looking pickup, and the driver was soon identified—a 21-year-old white man, a local who, Trump-like, hated all this agitation by black people.

The main artist was contacted by the City Council, told of the destruction, and invited to repair the painting. She thought it over and replied that she had a different idea, maybe a better one. She invited the young man who defaced the art to have a conversation with her.

Can you sense the whisper?

Shocked and embarrassed that his deed of hate done under the cover of night was now public knowledge, he reluctantly agreed to meet with her. She told him she wanted him to know what it was like growing up black in Cambridge, and she asked him what it was like growing up white in town. They talked, exchanged experiences, and got to know each other. The artist explained to the young man what the phrase “Black Lives Matter” means to black folk. At one point, the young man broke down and said, “I am so sorry. What can I do?”

The following Sunday afternoon, the young man and his parents stood on the footpath next to the painting. They were joined by the artist plus about forty other

town folk, black and white. The young man stepped forward and made a public apology for what he had done. Then he took a paintbrush and joined the artist in the middle of the street. Instead of painting over the damage, the artist had another vision. At the top of each tire tread, the artist and the young man painted the blooms of beautiful flowers. The marks of the tires were now the stems of roses.

Can you sense the whisper?

Now this hasn't healed a racial divide nor made a huge dent in racism. Even as the young man and the artist worked together to paint the flowers, the mocking sounds of other young men gunning the engines of their pickups and burning rubber could be heard in the surrounding streets, and some African American parents at the Sunday event wondered out loud whether the next time their sons get in trouble with the law, the same zeal for reconciliation rather than punishment would prevail.

To look for such rays of resurrection light amid the gloom is surely part of what we call faith. To trust these glimpses more than the darkness as the harbinger of the fullness of Christ's reign is surely part of what we mean by hope. Leonard Cohen – there is a crack in everything. That is how the light gets in. When there seems nothing but fear and death and brutality and terror and uncertainty and confusion, the reign of God can break in. Easter reminds us that we never know where life is going to come from next, so don't become too attached to yesterday, because today Christ is alive, bringing what humankind most needs.

Mark is whispering to us – Christ is risen. Christ is risen indeed. Listen for the whisper. It's all around us.

Tom Long story told in [Easter 21.indd \(wncpresby.org\)](#)

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