

## Sixth week of Lent 22-28 March

©Written by Rev Dr André Groenewald



“It is important to give a health warning when asking people to think/talk about the subject of trauma, even just in theory. People are not always consciously aware of **what past trauma** may be stored in their body/unconscious memory” (Hilary Ison 2021).

### Introduction

Just to recap, Michael Paterson (2020)<sup>1</sup> defines trauma as “A normal response to an abnormal & inescapable experience or set of circumstances that overwhelms our usual coping mechanisms, adversely affects our functioning and poses serious threats to our wellbeing”. Modern studies on trauma teaches us that Trauma can be physical, social, mental, or spiritual or all four, be short lived or enduring. It is often a specific reaction or an automatic collection of physiological responses to an event, which are triggered when an individual’s or community’s adaptive capacity is overwhelmed (Warner, Southgate, Grosh-Miller & Ison 2020:1<sup>2</sup>, see Jones 2019: 15)<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Paterson, M 2020. Presentation at the Scottish Regional APSE group on 5 June 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Warner, M, Southgate, C Grosh-Miller CA & Ison, H 2020. Introduction in Warner, M & Southgate, C & Grosh-Miller, CA & Ison, H (eds). *Tragedies and Christian Congregations*, 1-9. Oxon: Routledge.

<sup>3</sup> Jones, S 2019. *Trauma and grace. Theology in a Ruptured world*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Louisville, KY: WJK.

No-one deals with or recover from trauma in the same way (see Ison 2020:49-50)<sup>4</sup>. Everyone experiences and deals with trauma and tragedy differently. I am sure that this was also the case with the women who went to the grave. They must have grieved the death of Jesus especially in the face of the traumatic way that He died. They must have been feeling sad, numb, overwhelmed, scared, anxious (who is going to roll the stone away from the cave), and uncertain as to what the future will hold for them.

### **Setting the scene**

Originally the Gospel of Mark ended with chapter 16 verse 8 in a very abrupt way with the group of women running away. He “leaves us peering into the gaping space” with an open ending or a “nonending” that never comes, which is “unnerving” (Jones 2019:89)<sup>5</sup>. Mark tells us the story of the Resurrection in only 8 verses while the Gospel of Matthew has 20, the Gospel of Luke 53 and John’s Gospel 56. Mark also does not report on any appearances of Jesus. It was only later traditions that added the rest of verses 9-20 to the chapter, adding a more appropriate ending.

Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome went to the cave where Jesus’ body was laid to rest by Joseph of Arimathea. According to Mark 16:9, Mary Magdalene was the woman whom Jesus had cast seven demons out. Mary, the mother of James the younger and of Joses (see Mark 15:40–41, Mark 6:3) was the mother of Jesus (see Neyrey & Stewart

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<sup>4</sup>Warner, M, Southgate, C Grosh-Miller CA & Ison, H 2020. Introduction in Warner, M & Southgate, C & Grosch-Miller, CA & Ison, H (eds). *Tragedies and Christian Congregations*, 1-9. Oxon: Routledge.

<sup>5</sup> Jones, S 2019. *Trauma and grace. Theology in a Ruptured world*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Louisville, KY: WJK.

2008:43)<sup>6</sup>. Matthew 13:55-56 mentions the sons being James and Joseph. It is only Mark who uses the less common variation of "Joses" for Joseph. Mark does not give us any details about Salome. We only have an account in Matthew 27:56 telling us that the other woman who were watching from a distance was the mother of the sons of Zebedee's namely James and John (Mark 3:17). Luke mentions another woman being present named Joanna (see Luke 24:10). Let us now focus on the text and imagine ourselves standing in their sandals.

### **Bible reading Mark 16:1-8**

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. **2** Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb **3** and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?" **4** But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. **5** As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed. **6** "Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. **7** But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'" **8** Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

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<sup>6</sup> Neyrey, JH & Stewart EC 2008. *The Social World of the \new Testament*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson.

## Questions to ponder on?

1. Is there a situation that you can think of that made you feel overwhelmed, unable to cope with?

## Reflection

In Biblical times men and women had different roles. One of the roles of women was to anoint the dead with strong spices. In our narrative the woman could not anoint Jesus directly after He died. Joseph of Arimathea took the body of Jesus and buried Him in a tomb that he prepared for himself (see Matthew 27:59-60)<sup>7</sup>. The poor could not afford burials in tombs cut out from the rocks (cf Stander & Louw 1990:74)<sup>8</sup>. Their bodies were usually buried in shallow graves covered by stones and soil outside the towns (see Luke 7:12)<sup>9</sup>.

All the burials had to take place very soon after someone died due to the warm climate which caused the bodies to decompose quickly. Burials were forbidden on Sabbath days or any other Holy days. Usually, the people washed the bodies and wrapped them in linen. It was only in Egypt that bodies were put in coffins. It was regarded as shameful not to bury your loved ones (Stander & Louw 1990:74)<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> "Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away."

<sup>8</sup> Stander, HF & Louw JP 1990. *Gebruike en Gewoontes in die Bybel*. CUM: Kaapstad.

<sup>9</sup> "As he approached the **town gate, a dead person was being carried out**—the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with her."

<sup>10</sup> Stander, HF & Louw JP 1990. *Gebruike en Gewoontes in die Bybel*. CUM: Kaapstad.

The women had to wait until the Sabbath was over to buy some perfumed oils and strong spices. It was custom to anoint the bodies to get rid of body odours. It was thus incredibly early on the first day of the week (Sunday) that they were traveling to the place where they saw Jesus' body was laid to rest by Joseph of Arimathea. On the way to the cave (tomb) they were obviously anxious as to how they are going get access to the body of Jesus since they saw with their own eyes how Joseph sealed the tomb with a big stone. But then, as they were wondering about this practical issue, they noticed that the stone was already rolled away! Matthew explains how the stone was rolled away (Matthew 28:2)<sup>11</sup> and he is the only one who narrates the presence of guards at the tomb (see Matthew 27:64-66)<sup>12</sup>

As they entered, they saw a young man in white clothing sitting on the right side. Mark does not tell us anything more. He assumes that everyone – even the women - would know that the young man was an angel. Matthew 28:5 explicitly says that the young man was an angel. Luke 24:4 reported two angels (Borg & Crossan 2008: 196)<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> "There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it".

<sup>12</sup> "So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first." "Take a guard," Pilate answered. "Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how." 66 So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard."

<sup>13</sup> Borg, MJ & Crossan, JD 2008. *The last week. What the Gospels really teach about Jesus's final days in Jerusalem*. London: SPCK.

The women were given a commission to tell the disciples and Peter that Jesus will appear to them in Galilee. Although Mark does not include any appearances of the risen Jesus, he does promise to appear in Galilee. And then he ends the Gospel with the one liner: "Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid."

### Contemporary lesson

Jones (2019: 94)<sup>14</sup> calls Mark's ending an "uncomfortable unending". The ending calls for a silent pause, or even a dramatical gesture of some kind (facial expression, stance, or posture). The listener is forced to ask him or herself: what terrified the woman? What was it that the angel said that was almost too much to bear? The answer lies within our narrative. Jesus's resurrection was Traumatic, because death was no longer an absolute reality, which shattered their reality of life's expectancy (see Jones 2019: 96)<sup>15</sup>. They are left traumatized, frightened, and did what some trauma sufferers do by running away, which like I said before, can be one of the reactions of a traumatic experience (fight, flight, freeze or collapse) (see Hilary Ison 2020:49)<sup>16</sup>.

The narrative invites all victims of traumatic events to walk with their embodied emotions of shock, grieve or hurt towards the **unexpected**

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<sup>14</sup> Jones, S 2019. *Trauma and grace. Theology in a Ruptured world*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Louisville, KY: WJK.

<sup>15</sup> Jones, S 2019. *Trauma and grace. Theology in a Ruptured world*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Louisville, KY: WJK.

<sup>16</sup> Ison, H 2020. Working with an embodied and systemic approach to trauma and tragedy in Warner, M & Southgate, C & Grosch-Miller, CA & Ison, H (eds). *Tragedies and Christian Congregations*, 47-63. Oxon: Routledge.

(tomb), with fear and uncertainty, to meet the Resurrected Lord. The narrative offers all the victims the living HOPE to know that in the face of their traumatic experience that they are not alone. Death did/do not have the final say (see McBride 2016 :115)<sup>17</sup>. God's Gospel of grace and mercy towards His followers are always unfinished, open ended and always continuing, just like the open ending of Mark's narrative. "Its edge is unsettling and unnerving. It brings us to the voids and chasms in our experience where gestures of grace are imagined and at long last embodied. In these voids and silences we find that we are not alone: we are in a vast landscape of grace, broad and beautiful enough to hold all the fracturing of our lives, and in so holding us, to give us back ourselves made whole" (Jones 2019: 97)<sup>18</sup>

### **Food for thought**

In our current circumstances, we can describe our circumstances as a tomb experience with Covid-19 (the stone) preventing us to go out, socialise and live our lives. Our lives have been overwhelmed and we are experiencing the effects of trauma which can:

- overwhelm our normal resources to cope,
- disconnects us from our sense of self,
- shatters our assumptions,
- renders us powerless,
- make us feel hopeless.

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<sup>17</sup> McBride, D 2016. *Stations of the Cross then and now*. Hampshire: Redemptorist Publications.

<sup>18</sup> Jones, S 2019. *Trauma and grace. Theology in a Ruptured world*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Louisville, KY: WJK.

Tom Wright (2020:59)<sup>19</sup> says we (living through the Pandemic) share three things with the early Jesus followers namely “tears, locked doors and doubt”. I would add another two namely shock, which is apparent in the behaviour of the women in Mark’s Narrative, but also hope. The suddenness and severity of the life threatening Covid-19 shocked everyone to his/her core and overwhelmed our normal strategies to cope. The Risen Jesus gives us HOPE to know that He could not be contained in a sealed tomb.

So how do we cope?

It is interesting to note that we, as followers of Jesus, are not the first ones to have coped with a pandemic. In the time of Martin Luther, there were plagues that threatened/endangered their lives too. Luther called the plague “poison and deadly dung” sent by the devil. In a letter to John Hess, November 1527, a pastor in Breslau, he gave the following advice: “Use medicine. Take whatever may be helpful to you. Fumigate your house, yard and street. Avoid persons and places where you are not needed or where your neighbor [sic] has recovered.” (Tappert 2003: 242)<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Wright, T 2020. *God and the Pandemic. A Christian reflection on the Coronavirus and its aftermath*. London: SPCK.

<sup>20</sup> Tappert TG 2003. *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel*. Vancouver: Regent College.

It seems that the early church, and the church of the Reformation coped with tragedies in a pragmatic way, helping those who were ill, and providing support and help.

As followers of Jesus, we too can make a difference in the world helping all those who are traumatized by tragic events. We can actively protest any form of violence. McBride 2016 :115<sup>21</sup> says: "A resurrection faith faces the cross and protests against the finality of that violence". We can help the victims of trauma to find their voices speaking to God about their suffering – even when there are no words. We can provide a safe space for people to vent their anger and anguish at God like so many people in the Bible did. We can use the cross of Jesus as an helpful aid.

The cross creates a space where we can place our needs, our anxieties and our grief. It has the capacity to open up a deep, hidden place within us, a place that in the usual course of events we may find difficult to access. Entering into this hidden, sometimes dark space is potentially therapeutic, providing we can be certain that we are being safely held (Everett 2018:80-81)<sup>22</sup>

As followers of Jesus we have a powerful message to convey to our world through the Narrative in Mark's Gospel namely:

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<sup>21</sup> McBride, D 2016. *Stations of the Cross then and now*. Hampshire: Redemptorist Publications.

<sup>22</sup> Everett, A 2018. *After the Fire: Finding Words for Grenfell*. London: Canterbury.

- The tomb which was sealed, could not contain the Risen Jesus;
- Jesus is not dead, He has been raised;
- Jesus' Resurrection means that death is overpowered for all those who follow HIM;
- Honest human emotions and reactions are part of the Resurrection Narrative;
- Hope, that surpasses all human understanding, emerged from the ashes of trauma and grief!

### **Questions to yourself**

1. What do you find the most difficult aspect of living in the Covid-19 pandemic?

2. How should we as followers of Jesus help ourselves and others during this Pandemic?

3. According to the Institute for Collective Trauma and Growth (<https://www.ictg.org>) there are four phases of a Collective Traumatic Response namely:

**Heroic:** in the beginning of the lockdown everyone was energetic and ready to move mountains for other people.

**Disillusionment:** as the lockdown continued people started to lose hope/energy and interest.

**Rebuilding and restoration:** in the summer there was almost a pause when lockdown restrictions eased and people started to rebuild their lives – albeit differently.

**Wiser living:** with the second lockdown people start to think more carefully about their lifestyle, and general wellbeing. Where do you find yourself?

## **Prayer**

God of resurrection, ever renewing, ever reviving,  
we adore you for your life-giving presence.

Son of Man, newly risen, sorrow made joy,  
we adore you for your sacrificial living and dying.

Holy Spirit, breezing among us this Easter morn,  
we adore you for breathing new life into us.

Lord Jesus,

thank you for promising to be with us always.

Help us to remember that promise

when we do not feel brave enough to be your disciples.

Help us to remember that the first people to know

that you rose from the tomb

were ordinary people like us,

women and men who did not feel very brave.

Give us courage to believe and to tell others –

as Mary did – this Easter and always.

Amen.

## **Hymn: Thine be the glory/ U zij de glorie**

Thine be the glory, risen, conquering Son;  
endless is the victory, thou o'er death hast won;  
angels in bright raiment rolled the stone away,  
kept the folded grave clothes where thy body lay.

Refrain:

Thine be the glory, risen conquering Son,  
Endless is the vict'ry, thou o'er death hast won.

Lo! Jesus meets us, risen from the tomb;  
Lovingly he greets us, scatters fear and gloom;  
let the Church with gladness, hymns of triumph sing;  
for her Lord now liveth, death hath lost its sting.

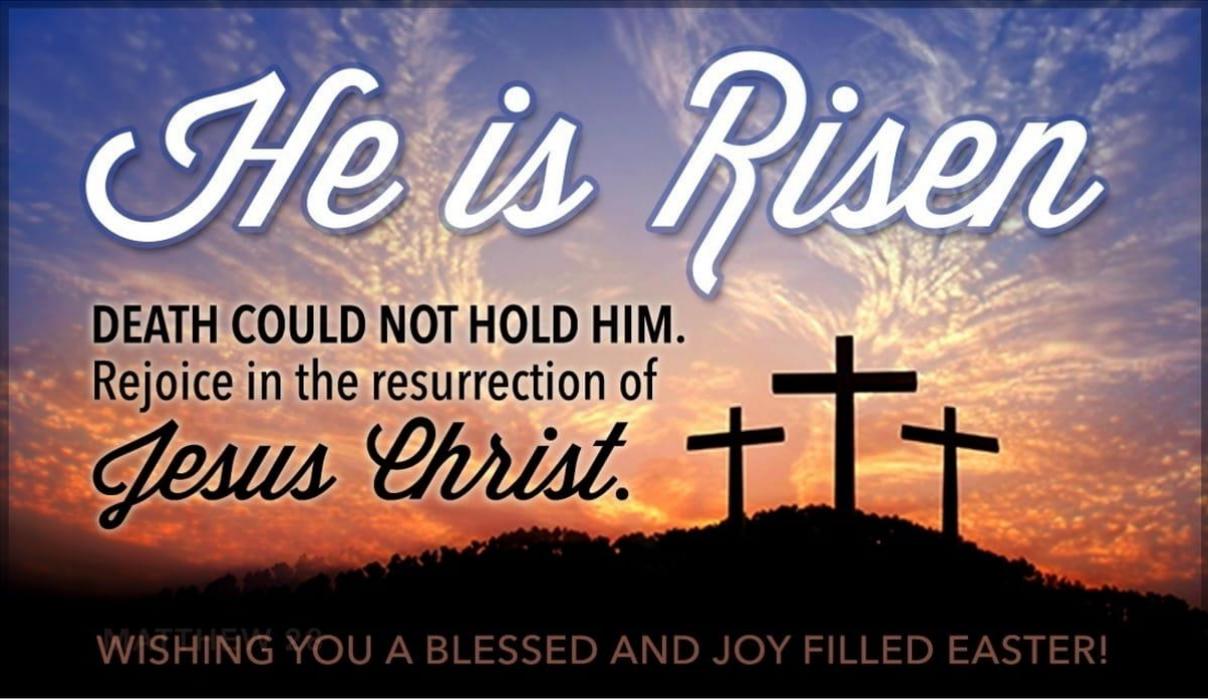
Refrain:

Thine be the glory, risen conquering Son,  
Endless is the vict'ry, thou o'er death hast won.

No more we doubt thee, glorious Prince of life;  
life is naught without thee; aid us in our strife;  
make us more than conquerors, through thy deathless love:  
bring us safe through Jordan to thy home above.

Refrain:

Thine be the glory, risen conquering Son,  
Endless is the vict'ry, thou o'er death hast won.

A graphic for Easter featuring a sunset sky with three crosses on a hill. The text is overlaid on the image.

*He is Risen*

DEATH COULD NOT HOLD HIM.

Rejoice in the resurrection of

*Jesus Christ.*

WISHING YOU A BLESSED AND JOY FILLED EASTER!

