

Dead

Mark 16:1-6

April 8, 2012

Jesus was dead. He didn't just faint. He didn't just appear to be dead. He wasn't mostly dead, like some character in a movie. Jesus was dead.

It wasn't a trick, an illusion, a divine Jesus abandoning his body, but living on in spirit, invulnerable to the power of death, eternal in spirit and ready to reappear in time in spiritual form or perhaps in some other body.

No, Jesus was a human being, fully a human being, a flesh and blood human being like any of us. And like any of us, like any other human being, when he was hung on a cross, he died. Rome had executed many, many criminals, many, many enemies of the state, and Jesus was just one more.

Jesus was dead. In fact, he died more quickly than most. When Joseph of Arimathea came to claim Jesus' body, Pilate was surprised to learn that Jesus was already dead. The army officer in charge of the crucifixion confirmed that Jesus had already been dead for some time.

Jesus was dead. Life had passed from his body. His lungs drew no more breath. His heart pumped no more blood. His brain no longer functioned. His body grew stiff as rigor mortis set in. He was dead and Joseph took his body and buried him in a tomb dug out of rock.

Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of James and Joseph, saw where he was buried. And after the Sabbath, very early on a Sunday morning, they and a third woman, Salome, went to the tomb, to anoint the body with spices, to pay their respects, to perform this act of mourning.

They had been there, all three of them, at Golgotha. They looked on from a distance, but they saw everything. They watched him die. They were among those who had followed Jesus in Galilee, among those who listened to him and learned from him and put their hopes in him, but unlike so many of the others -- unlike Peter and Judas and Andrew and the rest -- they had not abandoned Jesus. But he had abandoned them.

He was gone from them. He was dead. They watched him die. It was a most painful death, yes, most painful for him, but most painful for them, too, because all they believed, all they hoped, all they really loved, died with him.

They watched him die, just as they had watched others die, and just as others would one day watch them die. That's the way things are. That's the way things always will be, as long as there is an earth, as long as there are human beings.

He said the Kingdom of God was near. He made them believe that things could be different, that the world could be different, but he was dead and nothing had changed. Rome still did whatever Rome wanted to do. The powers of darkness, human or otherwise, still ruled. Death still ruled. Death claimed Jesus, and death would claim them, and death would claim all who came after them.

So they did all that was left for them to do. They went to the tomb, to anoint the body with spices, to pay their respects, to perform this act of mourning. This is their story ...