

## THEY SAID NOTHING TO ANYONE

Easter Day, St Michaels

Sunday April 5<sup>th</sup> 2015

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Any journey through London can be a journey of discovery. Set out, for example, from Baker Street station and track the blue plaques on buildings. So, beginning by observing the huge queue of people outside 221B Baker Street, where Sherlock Holmes never lived, of course, except in the mind of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Then, slip down Dorset Street to see the home of Charles Babbage who first invented the computer. Walking round the corner into Manchester Street, there lived Sir Francis Beaufort who invented the ‘wind-scale’. Just moments later you pass the house of Michael Faraday, who discovered the Electromagnetic Theory of Radiation, from which followed radio, television and so much that we now know of electricity.

Even closer to where *we* live is the home of Anthony Trollope, the novelist who enjoyed satirising cathedrals, and then just four doors away from where we live is the former home of Wilkie Collins. Collins, a very unconventional Victorian, wrote two of the most powerful and exciting mystery novels of the nineteenth century. *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone* were almost the first books in their genre. *The Woman in White* focuses on a strange, distressed woman, who it turns out has escaped from an asylum. *The Moonstone* focuses on a diamond, which disappears near the beginning of this most telling and mysterious tale. I’ll give you no more of the plots since *first* it would take too long, and *second* spoil it for you, if you haven’t read the novels.

I begin here, because Wilkie Collins was the master of the unfathomable mystery and today’s gospel is from a much much earlier master of mystery, by whom I mean, of course, St. Mark. Let me just return you to the gospel: Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome go to Jesus’ tomb only to find it empty. They find the great stone rolled back and they are greeted by a young man dressed in a white robe. He says to them:

‘Do not be alarmed; you seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen, he is not here; see the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you.

But *what* do these three women, whom he has told not to be alarmed actually do? Answer: ‘And they went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had come upon them; *and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.*’

It is the most *mysterious* – and, to use that word, *amazing*, ending one could imagine to any story, *let alone* the story of Jesus and his resurrection: ‘They said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.’ So how do we know of this? How indeed does anyone know? For the witnesses told *no one*. It is all the more mysterious remembering that almost universally it is accepted that Mark’s gospel was the first to be written. How could anyone ever know anything of the story of Jesus’ resurrection?

But with Mark, the *mystery* does not begin and end there. Mark leaves Wilkie Collins standing! Mystery frames the whole gospel. So, for example, as Jesus is arrested, Mark tells us that a young man followed Jesus, wearing nothing but a linen cloth. The men seized him but he left the linen cloth and ran away naked. We know nothing more about this young man, but, most interestingly, the fairly rare Greek word for linen cloth used here is the same word that Mark uses for the shroud in which Jesus is wrapped in the tomb. It’s the *only time* this word is used anywhere in the Bible! What is *this* about?

Or, throughout the gospel, when the disciples say to Jesus: ‘You are the Son of God’, he strictly orders them not to make him known. Elsewhere, after miracles, Jesus says: ‘See that you say nothing to anyone.’ Or, after the feeding of the 4,000 the disciples got into a boat with Jesus, and they realised that they had brought no bread. Jesus asks them how much bread and how much fish was left over after the feeding. They answer but then he gives no explanation for his questions. Twice in the conversation, Jesus asks ‘Do you not yet understand?’ They are baffled and no one has understood the puzzle until even this day!

So, Mark tells the gospel story uniquely, starkly and mysteriously. Jesus is hunted by his enemies from the very beginning. His card is marked. The narrative moves quickly and wherever he goes, Jesus charges the disciples to retain secrecy. Tell them nothing. In a lovely curious piece of verse, Robert Frost, the American poet wrote of this:

‘I have kept hidden in the instep arch  
Of an old cedar at the waterside  
A broken drinking goblet like the Grail  
Under a spell so the wrong ones can’t find it,  
So can’t get saved, as Saint Mark says they mustn’t.

Frost captures St. Mark perfectly. Almost certainly his gospel was written at a time of terrible persecution. Up until then the story of Jesus had just been passed on orally – perhaps with the passion rehearsed aloud, and by heart, on its own. Then other stories were told too. Mark, fearful that the entire gospel, the entire narrative of Jesus, might be lost writes it down, but at times, almost in code. His, then, was the first gospel.

So, finally, the resurrection, an occurrence that none might have ever imagined is the dénouement, the vindication of Jesus. It is the beginning of a new world for all humanity. No wonder the women were dumbstruck, no wonder they were afraid! No wonder they said nothing to anyone! This was *the greatest mystery of all time*. So it remains, and so we celebrate God’s breaking down of all we have come to know and expect of our world, of our experience, of human life - in the raising of Jesus. Now we need not be afraid. Now we *can* tell. Christ is raised. Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!  
Amen

### Readings

Isaiah. 25. 6-9.

I. Cor. 15. 1-11.

Mark. 16. 1-8.

Isaiah. 25. 6-9.