

Mark 16:1-8  
Isaiah 65:17-25  
I Corinthians 15:19-26  
April 4, 2010 - Easter

### Alive in Christ

The Woolly Mammoth has been extinct, for about eight or ten thousand years now. They looked like very hairy elephants and maybe were a little larger. Scientists at Pennsylvania State University now believe that there are enough Woolly Mammoth tissue samples that they can completely decode the DNA of the Mammoth. Since Mammoths and elephants are similar they believe that, beginning with a strand of living elephant DNA, they could meticulously alter that tissue sample, segment by segment, until it becomes identical with that of a Woolly Mammoth. All they would have to do is place an embryo in a female elephant and we would have Woolly Mammoths again. This could be amazing. I wonder if it would constitute resurrection. <sup>1</sup>

A team of European researchers has identified a new lineage of proto-human that left Africa about a million years ago, traveled as far

---

<sup>1</sup> Nicholas Wade - [Regenerating a Mammoth for \\$10 Million](#) in the New York Times Nov 19, 2008

as Siberia and then died out about 40,000 years ago.<sup>2</sup> They have their DNA and scientists have the DNA of Neanderthal man. Using the DNA of Chimpanzees, 98% the same as human DNA, it is now possible to alter tissue samples and make human like creatures. Amazing. Creating a living Neanderthal in such a way however, is ethically suspect, because it would mean tinkering with human or human like DNA. One wonders if we could in actuality experience some sort of terror filled Jurassic Park like moment. Even so, I wonder if this would constitute resurrection. It would be life after death.

For those like these Pennsylvania State University scientists who are intrigued with the possibility of new life; God has good news. Christ is risen, Christ is risen indeed. The morning of Easter is the in breaking of Life after death. Stone rolled away, empty tomb, young man in white, encounter with hope; Because of Easter we are as Paul says in his letter to the Corinthians alive in Christ. For as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ.

I am not sure why it took the church 1900 years to ordain women. It is clear from the Gospels that they were an integral part of

---

<sup>2</sup> David Brown - [DNA from bone shows new human forerunner, and raises array of questions](#) – Washington Post  
March 25, 2010

the ministry of Jesus; and on Easter Sunday morning here they are risking faith again. Judas has betrayed Jesus. Peter has denied him and the rest of his male disciples have fled; but Mary Magdalene, Salome and Mary the mother of Joses are there with spices and oils in hand ready to anoint the body.

Granted if we think about it, the fact that they come to the tomb with good smelling stuff to anoint the body proves that they didn't get it either. Obviously they didn't believe in the resurrection or they wouldn't be expecting the presence of any body to anoint. These women are alive in Christ, but they don't know it yet. These three mourners are on the way to the tomb to help themselves work through the grief. Hope has died. A part of them has died. They drag themselves to Easter – really not in such good shape. The pain, the loss, the death of a loved one is a terrible sadness. Maybe a part of you is dead today and you have dragged yourself to the tomb for some hope.

One of the reasons we have viewings and funerals is so we can learn to cope, so we can bring a certain level of closure to our anguish. In older times before funeral directors, one way we worked through our despair was to properly prepare the body for burial.

Mary, Mary and Salome were making peace. Their friend is dead. God is dead. The dream is dead. Spices in hand, they were facing the facts. The death of Jesus was the death of his claim that he was ushering in the dream and the kingdom of God. Unbelievers just like the 12 disciples, who have vanished; at least the women were there to do the right thing. They were present.

Stone surprisingly rolled back, tomb shockingly empty, young guy in white alarmingly full of advice; the plans for a proper burial suddenly go awry. The women are getting a very bad gut feeling. Can't anything go right? We thought at least we would be able to do this simple thing for Jesus. Do not be alarmed says the amazingly astute young man in white. I guess true messengers of God can deftly read human emotion. You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is not here for he is risen. Go and tell the disciples that Jesus is going ahead of you to Galilee – there you will see him.

The young man urged them not to be alarmed but Mark says the women fled the scene of the tomb. I don't know whether they dropped all the oils and spices or grabbed them quickly but they left that place for terror and amazement had seized them. Talk about

mixed emotions; terror and amazement at the same time. That sure is a curious recipe for sundry sentiments. Maybe we need to ask ourselves why there would be terror at the news that Christ is alive and heading for Galilee. Maybe we need to ask ourselves about the mixed emotions we bring to Easter.

One scholar of the Bible, a teacher at Columbia Presbyterian Seminary, Cameron Murchison suggests that people flee the resurrection in terror because if Christ is Alive and we are alive in Christ, it means work.<sup>3</sup> Yes terror could be the experience of standing in the presence of a messenger of God, dude in bright white, but far more likely has to do with recalling how many times Jesus invites us all to carry our own cross. For no matter how inspiring the vision and dream of Jesus; its costly character had been at least apparent since the midpoint of his ministry. The women, theorizes Murchison, had approached the tomb with a reverent grief, masking a deep relief that they were no longer burdened with the challenge of costly discipleship. They had begun to see the gain in the loss, only

---

<sup>3</sup> Cameron Murchison, Feasting on the Word Year C Volume 2, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville KY, 2008 page 354.

to be upended by the announcement that he is going on ahead to Galilee and we have to meet him there.<sup>4</sup>

You likely have noticed that the Easter story in the Gospel of Mark is a whole bunch shorter than what we read in Matthew, Luke and John. Mark basically ends his gospel by telling us that we must go and meet Jesus. Christ is alive, no details, but in order for us to be alive in Christ we must travel to Galilee to meet him. Mark invites us to write our own conclusion to the Gospel. Mark invites us to insert ourselves in the resurrection. Mark invites us to set out on a faith journey. No wonder there is terror. The messenger of God expects us to do something. It's not enough to come to church and sing alleluias. The Messenger expects us to act like we are alive in Christ. We have an Angel standing in front of us and he is cajoling us to engage. Jesus has placed his faith DNA in our hearts at creation and baptism and now we are charged with going into our world every day and making life.

One day a group of scientists got together and decided that humanity had come a long way and no longer needed God. So they picked one scientist to go and tell God that they were done with the

---

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

Holy One. The scientist walked up to God and said, "God, we've decided that we no longer need you. We're to the point that we can clone people and do many miraculous things, we really are quite fine on our own.

God listened very patiently and kindly to the person. After the scientist was done talking, God said, "Very well, how about this? Let's say we have a man-making contest." To which the scientist replied, "Okay, great!"

But, God added, "Now, we're going to do this just like I did back in the old days with Adam." The scientist said, "Sure, no problem" and bent down and grabbed himself a handful of dirt. God looked at him and said, "No, no, no. You go get your own dirt." We are more dependent on God than we are often ready to acknowledge.

I didn't tell that joke to pick on scientists. The study of science is amazing and so is being alive in Christ. The women fled from the tomb full of terror but also amazement. They could feel the change. Something joyful was creeping into their quickly pounding hearts. The earliest Christians, those who learned their faith from Peter and Salome and John and Mary Magdalene and the Apostle Paul, they believed that when you identify yourself with Christ's death on the

cross; then something within you actually dies. Your heart stops beating the way it did. You give up your old self.

They would tell you, this old nature of mine, before I knew the crucified and resurrected Christ died and I am an amazing new being called disciple. Oh this doesn't mean we are perfect, far from it. We all have been in church long enough to know there are no perfect churches and there are no perfect disciples. Heck most churches are a solid case study proving that Neanderthal man and women need not any DNA enhancements. Neanderthal man and woman are alive today, "mammothly" screwing up on a regular basis. Rob Bell However – of Neuma Video fame writes in his book Velvet Elvis "its not that we will never have to struggle or that the old person won't come back from time to time, It's that this new way of life [ this alive in Christ] involves a constant, conscious decision to keep dying to the old so that we can live in the new."<sup>5</sup> The amazing thing is that in baptism we become a new creation. The Spirit washes over us. We die and we are made alive in Christ (II Corinthians 5:17) "The issue then isn't beating myself up over all the things I am not doing or

---

<sup>5</sup> Rob Bell, Velvet Elvis Zondervan, Grand Rapids Michigan, 2005 page 140

the things I am doing poorly; the issue is my learning who this person is who God keeps insisting I already am.”<sup>6</sup>

So the women flee from the tomb in terror of the mission that is ahead them, but in amazement of the new life they are already feeling within because of the resurrection of Christ. They feel alive in Christ and yet they are in awe of what this new life means for them. It means they need to carry their own crosses. It means that like Jesus, they will have to stand up to injustice and systems of domination that crush people. It means that like Jesus they will need to comfort the lonely and treat even Neanderthal people like children of God. It means that like Jesus, they will be inconvenienced and in fact persecuted because the world is not necessarily in love with change. And when we are challenged by the ways that dominate the world, the world has a way of making us feel small and like we should go back. But God is retelling each of our stories in Jesus. God is writing a new ending for each of our paths. God is helping us everyday to die to the old crap, all the painful layers, wrong decisions, powerless moments, paralysis by despair. God is inviting us to meet Jesus in Galilee to write our own ending to the Gospel. Alive in

---

<sup>6</sup> ibid page 141

Christ, God is inviting us into an amazing partnership by which hearts are changed and the world is transformed.

Brian McClaren writes in his book *The Secret Message of Jesus*, which many of us have read, “Some scientists tell us that our universe faces one of two unhappy endings a big freeze or a big hot crunch, either way ....our planet...will be incinerated....you can’t help but remember the words of great philosopher Woody Allen: “Today we are at a crossroads. One road leads to hopelessness and despair; the other road to total extinction. Let us pray we choose wisely.” Happily the secret message of Jesus offers us an additional glorious option; that we are invited to participate with God and others in creation of a glorious harvest of joy, peace, justice, and love in a glorious story that never ends.”<sup>7</sup> Alive in Christ, we are assured that this life is not all there is – that there will be a real resurrection. Alive in Christ we are called to partner with God to start creating that future right now.

For Christ Crucified is risen and we are alive. He is risen indeed.

---

<sup>7</sup> *The Secret Message of Jesus*, W publishing Nashville, 2005 page 194