



Sunday, April 9, 2023

Speaker: Pastor John VanderWindt

Scripture: Mark 16:1-8

Sermon: He Has Risen

Good morning and Happy Easter to all of us. If I say "He has risen" you respond with... [waiting for congregation to respond]... and some of us are awake. How about the rest of us? Let's try that again. "He has risen." [Congregation responds with] "He has risen indeed!"

He has indeed risen and we are here to celebrate that today. We are going to take that and look at it and say, "So what difference does it make?" Because there are many people in the world who will attest to the fact that the tomb was empty. But why was the tomb empty? So today, we're going to read from Mark 16. I invite you to take your Bibles if you have one with you, otherwise, your phone, and turn to Mark 16. We're going to look at the first eight verses of Mark 16.

All four gospels describe the story of Easter morning. Throughout all of Scripture, as we just heard, Arlene [Hough] in her prayer, referred to the passage in 1 Peter. It talks about the resurrection of Christ. So this morning, we're going to look at that story. We're going to see how it plays out at that time, but also what difference does it make for us today that Jesus has indeed risen. So please follow along as we read the first eight verses from **Mark 16**.

1 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.

Join me in prayer. Dear Lord, we thank You for Your words. Lord, we thank You that You have revealed to us the story of Easter and that we can be, in some ways, witnesses to the empty tomb and know about your resurrection. Lord, this morning as we go through the story of Mark's telling of the Easter morning, we pray that You will open our ears and our hearts and that we may see anew Your love for us as we understand the power of the resurrection and the love displayed through it. Lord, we pray that Your words may speak and that Your spirit may move. In Jesus' name. Amen.

As already has been said a few times this morning, we gathered here on Friday evening. We stood at the cross and we witnessed the death of Jesus from Nazareth. And in the crowd at the base of the cross, there were plenty of people who were quite excited about Jesus dying. But there was also a group of women who were in tears. They, unlike some of the brave disciples, hung around. After the disciples fled, the women stayed.

At the end of Jesus's crucifixion, it was about Sabbath Time. For the Jews, the day begins at sundown. So on Friday evening at sundown, that is the beginning of Sabbath. And for them, they wanted to have Jesus buried before the Sabbath. Rather than most criminals where they would just let them hang on the cross until a few days later, Joseph of Arimathea requested to have Jesus taken down and to be buried in his tomb. In a tomb which was not yet complete but in a tomb which would house our Lord.

As part of the process, what people would do is put lots of spices, myrrh being one of them, on the body and around the body within the tomb. The idea was that that would kind of cover the odor of decomposition. Now, because they were in a hurry on Friday, it's not certain whether they were able to do all of that.

You will see in the first part of our text that the women bought spices when the Sabbath was over - so that would be Saturday night. After the Sabbath was over, they went and bought spices. But it was too late to go to the tomb. And so they waited until Sunday morning. And here they are on the way to the tomb to anoint Jesus's body. To prepare a tomb the way it should be prepared for the death of a loved one. You can just imagine these three women as they are going just after sunrise.

How many saw the sunrise this morning? Okay, so a couple of you. There we go. Good. Couple of you would have been up early enough for that. But most of us are like, "No, that's way too early." But they got up just before sunrise and they started making their way to the tomb. And you hear part of their discussion on the way to the tomb. They've got this question.

Now, how do they know that the stone is in front of the tomb? Well, if we backtrack to Friday night, we see that the women not only remained at the cross but the women also followed the body to see where the body would be buried so that they would be able to bring spices to it. And when they see the body being buried, they see this large stone being rolled in front of the tomb. And this large stone - the way it works is it kind of gets put into a groove so it's stuck there.

The idea is that the stone does not move again. But notice their question is, "Who's going to move the stone?" It's not, "Who's going to move the stone and what are we going to do about the soldiers that are there?" In other gospels, we read that the priests of that time said to Pilate, "We have a bit of a problem. There is this theory that he's going to raise himself again in three days. We want to make sure that it's protected so that the disciples don't steal the body. So can you seal it and put some soldiers there?" To which Pilate says, "Fine, go and seal it as best you can." And so they did. But the women don't know that. So they're on their way going, "Okay. There's this huge stone. What are we going to do with this?" But notice that it did not stop them from going.

Think about the times in your lives when you have known that you should go do something. And then you conveniently think of an obstacle that might be in the way or a response that you might get and you go, "Oh. No, better not." These women had an obstacle but yet they still went. Then in verse four, it says, "But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away." And they entered the tomb.

God took care of the problem for them. He moved the stone. So they entered the tomb and there they met an angel. It says here, "A young man dressed in white." Sources are pretty clear that that was an angel. And notice their response. A typical response when anybody sees an angel. They were alarmed, or they were afraid. I think that's a normal response for it. But here they are. They see the angel inside the tomb.

As I was doing my research this week, I listened to a lecture by RC Sproul. He said, "I can't prove this but I wonder if the angels were in the tomb the whole time?" Do you remember the Garden of Eden? God placed an angel by The Tree of Life. The Jews placed soldiers on the outside to protect it. But what if God placed angels on the inside to protect life eternal?

But that's another story. We're back here. They see the angels. They are alarmed. They're frightened. The angel says to them, "Don't be afraid." Typical first response of an angel. Right? Whenever you see these stories in Scripture, it's usually, "And the person was afraid and the angel responds with 'Don't be afraid.'" And then he says this. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene who was crucified. He has risen. He is not here. See the place where they laid him." This angel has now told the entire story of salvation. Jesus died, he was buried, and he has risen.

Jesus died, he was buried, and he was risen. Those three facts are, in essence, the most crucial facts of our faith all the way around. We read in **1 Corinthians 15:12-20**, Paul says this, "**12** But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? **13** If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. **14** And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. **15** More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised.

16 For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. **17** And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. **18** Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. **19** If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. **20** But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead..."

That's a question which has been debated for years. Right? One of the most historical documented events is the death in the empty tomb, not just from Christian sources but from non Christian sources. We know the tomb was empty. And so if the tomb was empty, one possibility is that Jesus rose. But for years and years until today, there have been many people who have thought, "We've got to come up with a different explanation. Maybe it's that the disciples came up with a story and they just wrote this story and got everybody to believe it."

Well, I'll tell you, if the disciples were to write a story, they wouldn't start with, "When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary, the mother of James, and Salome, went to the tomb and found it empty." If they were to write a story, they would never include the beginning of this story to be witnessed by women. No offense to the women. But during that time period, women were not even allowed to testify in court because their witness was seen as not credible. So if they were going to write a story about her, it would have been other men who found the tomb empty. It wouldn't have been women.

The other thing is people have said - and it's even stated in Matthew - where the chief priests go to the soldiers and say, "Hey, I tell you what. Just tell them that the disciples stole the body." If we think about it, these disciples - who, on Thursday night, met up with the soldiers and fled while Jesus was still alive - do you really think that they would go and decide, "You know what, now that he's dead, let's go fight the soldiers there and steal his body." And even if they did that, where did it end up after that? And do you think they would have lived the rest of their lives telling a lie and then dying a cruel death for the sake of a lie?

We also read in Scripture that Jesus appeared to people. And so some people say, "Well, maybe it was just a hallucination." Well, you can't have that many people hallucinating the same event at the same time. So a deeper question is, "Am I willing to accept by faith that Christ rose or am I going to continue to look for evidence which may be contrary to that?" The answer is both actually would take faith. If we look at when the books of the New Testament were written, there were many people who were still around at the time of the crucifixion and resurrection. And they would be able to testify that, "Here is what happened." So then they give us evidence to say, "Okay, Jesus rose from the dead."

So what difference does it make? It makes all the difference in the world. If you are going to put your faith in something, don't you want to put it into something which is living? If you think about the resurrection, you have to understand that first of all, Jesus rose from the dead. That means the person who we follow is not dead. We don't follow a leader in a faith where the leader has died. But we follow a faith in God in which Christ is alive.

The angel said, "He is not here, for he has risen." Now think about that for a minute. He has risen. Jesus on Friday was the sacrifice for our sins. He took on himself all of our sins, so that we may be atoned and redeemed and brought righteous before God. And God says to Jesus, "I have accepted your sacrifice." By the resurrection of Christ that shows that God accepts the sacrifice of Christ. But it also shows that Christ has defeated the power of sin and death.

And we might say, "Well, that's really nice. Now I can be forgiven." But it goes much beyond that. Not only can we be forgiven, but we also now have a friend who is with us in all things. In Romans 5:6, Paul writes this, "You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly."

Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person. For a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love for us in this, that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. And just before that, he says in Romans 5:1, "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Think about that for just a minute. Because you believe in Christ, you now have peace with God. **Romans 5:2-5**, "2 And through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. 3 Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; 4 perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us."

When we think about the resurrection, when we think about the fact that Jesus has risen and is alive, we can remember that because he is alive, He is present with us. And so in times of suffering, we are not alone. Even though we may feel like we've been abandoned by all the people around us, we know that Jesus will not abandon us. He is always here. Would you like a friend? Would you like a friend who knows all about you? And still loves you? Would you like a friend who would say to you today, "Hey, let's hang out for a while. Tell me about your troubles. Tell me about your joys. Let me hear about the things that worry you."

Jesus says to each of us, "I want to be that friend." Not only a friend who hangs out with you, but because He is God. He is also a friend who can forgive your sins. But there's more. If we look at the world today, I think for many people, there is kind of a loss of hope. What does the future really bear for me? What will life be like in 10 years or 20 years or for some of us who are much younger, in 60 years? What would it be like? What will the world be like? And then we can say that we have confidence that we know that when we get older that Jesus will still be there with us.

But it's even better than that. For many people in the world today, they look at this life and say, "This is all there is. Eat, drink and be merry because when I die, I die and I'm done." And Jesus says, "Oh no, I've got something much better than this for you. And not just for you but for all who love God."

Mike said earlier, "Oh death where is your sting?" It's taken away. Yes, there's sorrow. Yes, there is pain at the loss of someone that we love. But there is so much more. There is a future that Jesus says to us, "I will guarantee a future for you which is far beyond anything that you can ever imagine." And today on Easter, Jesus says, "We commemorate my resurrection and I invite you into this place, to invite me into your life, and one day we will celebrate your resurrection. And for those of us who know Christ in this way, we know that we can live with confidence and assurance that there is life with him, that there is peace, and hope that comes from Him that cannot be explained by anything else.

If you're in a place where you're not sure of that, today I invite you to ask Jesus. Ask Jesus to say, "Lord, we talked about a resurrection. We talked about you being present." And then ask Jesus to make himself real to you in a new way as well. Then allow yourself to be alarmed and amazed. When we read **Mark 16:8**, it says, "Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid."

I don't know about you but I think if I just had an encounter with an angel, I'd be a little nervous too. I think if I just had an encounter with an angel and he told me something which totally blew my mind, I would also be overwhelmed. And I can understand in their shoes where they'd be going, "Okay, let's think about this for a moment. We'll go back to these guys who don't really believe what we say anyway and tell them we saw an angel and that Jesus has risen. Yeah, that's a good idea." I'm sure they were like, "Okay. They told us that they needed to tell the disciples and Peter to go to Galilee. We'll do that. But I'm not sure we're going to talk about this experience to anybody else yet for a bit."

But we are way beyond that. We know that Jesus has risen. We know with lots of people that Jesus has risen. So we don't need to be afraid to share that story anymore. In fact, at the end of Matthew, Matthew says that Jesus tells His disciples, "Go into all the world and make disciples of all nations." We need to be sharing the story all over the place. And some of us might be thinking, "Yeah, that's good for you but I'm not sure I'm qualified for that." Right? "I haven't always lived a really good life. You know, I'm not that great of a person."

Did you see what the angel did when he tells them in verse seven, "But go, tell his disciples and Peter..." That's very specific. The angel knows that Peter is a disciple and that he's included in the group. But he's very specific and says, "Go tell Peter." Why? Because Peter denied him. Peter ran away. And I'm sure that if the women came back and said, "Hey, he's risen and he wants to meet you in Galilee, Peter would be thinking, "Not me. I know what I did. I think I'll just wait here. You guys go. That's fine. Tell me what happens. I ain't going. I can't face that piece." And the angel tells the women specifically, "Jesus wants to meet Peter." He says, "Peter, I love you and it doesn't matter what has happened in the past. I've died for that. Come be with me. Come hang out with me. I want you to be with me."

Jesus says to each of us today, "Come hang out with me. I've been raised. I'm alive. I am present with you at all times. I desire to hang out with you."

So today on Easter, we can celebrate. We can gather with family. We can gather with friends. We can gather alone. And Jesus is in our presence. And today we celebrate with the angel who said, "He is not here, for he has risen." Let's try that again. "He is not here for he has risen." Most of us are getting it. Let's try it again. "He is not here for he has risen."

All right. Do we believe that? Are we willing to go there?

Let's pray. Dear Lord, we thank you that you have indeed risen. Lord, we thank you that not only have you risen but you have invited us to walk with you and that you walk with us each day. Lord, you have forgiven us for our sins but you have also befriended us. Lord, we ask that you will in your own way make yourself real to each of us today. That we may know that you have risen indeed. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Transcribed by: *Liza Perry*