

Church of the Rock**04/04/2021****Easter Sunday****First reading:** John 20:11-16**Title:** He has risen**Scripture:** Mark 16:1-8**Theme:**

The greatest story ever told is so unbelievable that one can't help but believe it.

Introduction:

I can't imagine how Friday and Saturday must have felt. Not for any of them. Afterall, the beginning of the week started out so well.

Jesus was received by the crowd as the one who was to come and be king. Riding down that hill on the donkey with everyone cheering.

Yet, all the disciples had been told by Jesus that it wouldn't end like they thought. He did actually tell them that he would go to Jerusalem and He would be killed.

Just another time when poor Peter got it so wrong. Telling Jesus if that is the case then you can't go. Then telling him that he would never abandon Him.

But he did. Then again, so did everyone else once they took Jesus down from the cross.

Everyone that is except Joseph of Arimathea, and three ladies: Mary, Mary, and Salome. Joseph, along with Nicodemus, buried Jesus. The ladies followed and watched. They knew exactly where the tomb was.

Perhaps over the course of a couple days a man may have lost his way back there, but not a woman. No, they followed because they knew what they were going to do as soon as the Law allowed.

They were going back, and they would complete what Joseph had started in order that Jesus' body be properly tended to. Afterall, He was dead.

The Story:

This beautiful Easter morning 2021, I want us to look at three things here in Mark that help us celebrate, understand the truth of what happened in that garden, and perhaps even understand what our assignment is.

- 1- The women (1-3)
- 2- The scene (4-6)
- 3- The assignment (7-8)

First, the women.

Let's just be completely honest. If anyone was going to write a believable story about the Jewish Messiah or any "Messiah" of that time, this is not how you would start it out.

Not if you wanted anyone to believe what you were going to share. Mary Magdalene, a woman of some questionable character. Mary the mother of Jesus, and Salome, perhaps the mother of James and John.

These ladies are the first witnesses, the first story tellers of the empty tomb in the garden, have a testimony that would not hold up in court, would not even be taken seriously by the disciples because they were, well, women.

Women had no standing or any type of authority then in society, yet they are the very first to see, to believe and to be sent.

Friday passes into Saturday and everyone sits in shock. Still trying to figure out just how it could have all gone so sideways.

Saturday passes, and the moment day breaks, probably still the dusk just before full dawn, these three head out where they are staying:

"When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb."

-Mark 16:1-2 ESV

On the way a very practical concern arises. How on earth are we going to move the grave stone:

"And they were saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?"

-Mark 16:3 ESV

Who's going to help us move it? This is important because they, just like everyone else, were smart enough to know Jesus was really dead when they took him down from the cross.

They had no expectation other than the fact that he would still be in the tomb when they got there. It's really an amazing thing, given that Jesus had said so many times that this is what to expect, but that I would rise.

Much like with Martha and Mary when he raised Lazarus, they didn't understand that it would be in the middle of history, all that had ever made any sense to them, was about to be undone.

They had been around for all the other miracles. Everywhere Jesus went He healed the sick, even brought people back to life. Along with Lazarus, the widow's son in Nain, and Jairus's daughter too.

That's what happens when heaven invades earth and the Kingdom of God is at work. It's a different kind of power. That's what made Jesus so unique in this world.

Jesus had declared who He was and what he was going to do. Then He did it, and people wrote it down.

Every one of them, in their records, started this day out with women going to the tomb, thinking they were going to find a dead guy.

It's exactly what we would do and think. Why? Because it's irrational to think something else. Once you are dead, for everyone in history, you stay dead. Even way back then, they understood that.

Oh, but the courage of these ladies to be out and going to the tomb the moment they could when the boys are locked up and hiding, cannot be missed.

It was the women who had the courage that first Easter morning to go, and a big deal ought to be made of that, especially when so many talk about how oppressive the Bible is toward women.

If that is what someone truly believes, it just means that person hasn't really read it through and through.

The revaluing of women throughout the Biblical story is clear, and in Jesus's ministry it is very clear. In God's goodness it's women, not men, certainly not the impetuous and brave Peter, who are the first to arrive at the tomb.

Worrying this first Easter of the very practical and mundane: "We need to tend to His body, to anoint Him. But the stone is too heavy to move."

Little did they know, that it had already been taken care of. The women, and now:

2- The scene:

They get to the place where Jesus was put in the tomb and things aren't as they expected.

Now remember a couple weeks ago we learned that Pilate told the Sanhedrin that they had guards to use, and sent them to make the tomb as secure as possible.

Well, what they thought was a cake walk assignment; watch and make sure no one takes a dead guy away, turned into an epic failure on their parts.

Because when Mary, Mary and Salome show up:

"And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back—it was very large."

-Mark 16:4 ESV

Now, I don't know what they were thinking, perhaps that the disciples got there ahead of them and moved the stone and were tending to Jesus.

What I do know is that they don't ask questions they just go into the tomb:

"And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed."

-Mark 16:5 ESV

They go looking to anoint Jesus, and instead they find an angel. "A young man dressed in white", an angel. A heavenly visitor.

Boy the morning just keeps getting weirder, doesn't it?

There is reason why so many can't believe this story, outside of the truth that the

human heart is hardened against the things of God.

If we are honest, so much of it seems so unbelievable to the rational mind. I get that, but if His followers wanted to make it as easy to believe as possible and make sense to "normal people", they have missed the mark on every count.

Everything they record for us makes it more difficult to believe, not easier. So why record it this way? I would submit to you that, perhaps, just perhaps, because this is what actually happened, and just what they found that early Sunday morning.

This is the evidence. These are the witnesses. Yeah, I know they are three women, No, I know their testimony is weak and it's ignored. But listen, this is what we got.

They saw Him. Let's not forget what John tells us. Mary Magdalene thought, through tears, that Jesus was a gardener!

"Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away."

-John 20:15 ESV

Back to Mark, because he is the one who is always quick and to the point, this angel says:

"And he said to them, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him."

-Mark 16:6 ESV

He's not here! Well, we can see that! It's quite the scene isn't it? Put yourself there, perhaps on one of your walking trails, or in your back garden, in the very early hours of the morning.

The dew still on the grass, the mist and fog still rising and dissipating as the sun slowly comes up. Here you are, all alone -in shock and still trying to make sense of all that has happened these past three days.

You go to anoint the body of your Rabbi, your friend, your Lord. Afterall, now you can grieve, say your final goodbye's, pray, weep, express your heart.

Every one of us who has suffered loss, which is all of us at some point, knows just how they feel at this moment. We know the tears of Mary as she finds Him gone.

That tenderness of Jesus which John records for us, to just say her name to her: "Mary". As John tells us, there was no hiding in the garden, like there was with Adam and Eve.

No, Mary isn't hiding from God, she is looking for her Lord Jesus, her friend. God is not walking in the cool of the day looking for her -she through tears is looking for Him, and she finds Him: ALIVE.

Talk about a roller coaster and emotional whiplash. What a story, and if this doesn't set you back and thinking about just who this Jesus is, I pray you take some time to think it through.

The women, the scene, and now:

3-The assignment

You ladies are my first sent ones, my first Apostles. We see again here in Mark the tender heart of God on display.

Much like John shows us that Jesus gives Mary just what she needs in the moment, there is another one who is going to need some extra care.

He's been wondering the last few days if he even belongs with the group anymore. He did the very thing Jesus said he

would, and he (Peter) argued with Jesus that, No, he wouldn't.

"And Jesus said to them, "You will all fall away, for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.' But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee." Peter said to him, "Even though they all fall away, I will not." And Jesus said to him, "Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times." But he said emphatically, "If I must die with you, I will not deny you." And they all said the same."

-Mark 14:27-31 ESV

So much for revisionist history, and the airbrushing out of all that shows us in a bad light. No, here in this book, it's all there! The good, the bad, and the ugly.

Pride and arrogance -these great separators. So divisive that it got Adam and Eve thrown out of the garden -and the consequences of sin have haunted us ever since.

They destroy relationships, churches, institutions: PRIDE/ARROGANCE -God knew Peter's heart, and that is what is seen

here. Peter was broken, questioning himself.

"My mouth wrote a check my heart couldn't cash, and I promised Jesus, in front of everyone, that wouldn't happen. I would go with Him to the end, but I couldn't even hold my ground when a young girl challenged me."

Have you ever been in a place like that? Wondering if God is going to hear you again, pick you up again, forgive you again.

Well, Easter is for you. That is the beauty, the power and the reason for Easter morning. Because, YES! He does and He will, every day and in every way.

I have two words that prove it: "AND PETER." The assignment:

"But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you."

-Mark 16:7 ESV

Listen, when you get to the room where they are, tell them Jesus is going ahead to Galilee, just as He said he would. And oh, yeah, you let Peter know that he is still a part of the group.

He needs to know that. He's struggling with what he did and he needs to know that not even what he did puts him beyond redemption and forgiveness.

You let him know that even though his pride and arrogance wouldn't let him see that coming, I knew, and I love him still.

The moment of God's call for us all. Will we answer. Peter, just like you and me, on Easter morning have the choice -Jesus is calling, of that there is no doubt.

The question is: Will you answer? Will you respond? Will you go to Galilee? The truth of the matter is this:

Jesus IS alive! All the evidence points to that truth, even the unsettledness of the ladies when they got their assignment:

"And they went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid."

-Mark 16:8 ESV

He is waiting for you. Christian or not yet Christian, Jesus is calling and waiting for you. He has a message. He has an assignment. He loves you, and wants

you to come to Him and leave the cares, worries and ways of this world behind.

He is Risen, and there is nothing that can keep you from Him except your choice. I challenge you today, do not harden your hearts, come to Jesus, Paul tells us this:

"What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us

from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

-Romans 8:31-39 ESV