History’s Mystery

# (Mark 16.1-8)

Today we gather with believers all over the nation and all over the world celebrating that the tomb of Jesus Christ is empty. It’s history’s mystery, Jesus isn’t there, he wasn’t there because he’s risen from the dead. For that reason, we worship and give him praise this morning, but we come from a very different position than those first believers. You see, we haven’t walked with the Son of God, we haven’t sat at his feet, we haven’t learned from him or witnessed all the miracles. But on that first Easter Sunday the disciples of Jesus discovered an empty tomb and all their hopes and dreams which had unraveled before their very eyes this weekend suddenly began unfolding in a very different way.

You see, like us they had to live life moment by moment, like us they had to live life day by day, and like us they had to move forward in faith even when the path was unclear. I believe there’s so much we can learn from these early followers of Christ as we join them at the tomb of Jesus this morning. You know, here they are still grieving over the trauma of his arrest, his suffering and death; their master, teacher, and Lord was gone, and now they come to the tomb still in shock over his crucifixion, feeling empty and grieving in disbelief.

As a few women enter the garden cemetery on the first day of the week, I want to read from Mark’s gospel at chapter 16, beginning in verse one.

*“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. Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?" (Mark 16:1-3).*

These women, these disciples of Jesus, brought spices to prepare Jesus body, to anoint Jesus body, but it wasn’t until they were well along the way that they realized they didn’t have the strength to move the stone. Now, they knew that Peter had the strength, he could help them, but he wasn’t there now, he was nowhere to be found. And so, they’re wondering, number one, who will roll the stone away.

## 1. Who Will Roll the Stone Away

You see, these women had a different kind of strength, they had the kind of strength that empowered them to go to the place where their hope had been laid dead in the tomb. They had a kind of strength that enabled them to do the best they could even in the midst of great disappointment. But now they realized that they had a greater obstacle on the outside than what they were wrestling with on the inside. This tomb where their Lord had been laid, was a burial chamber, a cave carved into the hillside with a large stone rolled across the opening. And so, now they’re trying to figure out what to do because the men who should’ve been with them were nowhere to be found. They’ve got the spices, but this stone was very large, and they didn’t have the strength to move it by themselves.

Now, I don’t know why none of the men were there with them, but I assume that Peter and the others must’ve just been so disappointed that they didn’t even want to show their faces. And maybe you can relate too because I know when I have an expectation that God is going to do something, when I’m believing in a miracle, the greater my faith the deeper my disappointment. You know, when you really believe in something, like when I laid hands on my mother, anointing her with oil, and praying for her to be healed. I really believed and yet weeks later she passed away and it can be so discouraging, it can keep you from expecting much or believing much because you don’t want to be vulnerable. But true genuine faith is very vulnerable, faith is fragile, because it puts you in a place where you’re really expecting something that you have no control over.

I can’t help but think that Peter must’ve been reflecting on what he really believed this weekend. You know, in the shadow of the cross he must’ve thought this was the end, and it wasn’t just Peter because the others weren’t there either. You know where the others, his brother…

*“Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James, the other Simon, and the other Judas (Luke 6:14-16).*

You know, where were they? I wonder if each one was so disappointed that they were afraid to risk greater disappointment.

And so, the women with that quiet strength had gone down to the tomb, they’ve got the spices, and they’re on the way when they realize that they can’t do what they came to do because they’re not strong enough. I wonder if there are any of you who have felt like that? There’s something in your way, maybe an addiction, or fear, or your past, but no matter how strong you feel you know there’s an immovable stone in your way. These three women recognized that they can’t do it, it’s just too big, but they asked the right question.

*“Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?" (Mark 16:3).*

The answer to that question is the hope of Easter, because God had already begun the process, the miracle was in motion. And there is somebody who needs to know that God is already working on whatever you’re worried about. It may seem like a mountain impassable and immovable, but if you’ll keep moving forward that stone will roll away.

Mark tells us in verse four, when they got there,

*“When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed” (Mark 16:4-5).*

This young man dressed in a white robe was an angel of the Lord, this is confirmed in the other gospel accounts. For example, Matthew chapter 28 is very descriptive, telling us in verse two,

*“There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. (Matthew 28:2-4).*

This must’ve been an amazing sight, and so it’s no wonder the women were alarmed when they arrived. This angel was sitting there, not because he was tired, but because he was preaching one of the greatest sermons we could ever hear without saying a single word. You see, this angel could’ve done anything, he could’ve stood, he could’ve hovered over the stone, he could’ve done a lot of things, but it was customary that when the teacher got ready to teach they sat in a seat of authority. And so, not only did the angel sit on this stone, but he sat on the very thing that the devil tried to use to stop Jesus.

I wonder what the enemy has tried to roll in front of you. What’s that circumstance, difficulty, or issue that you’re facing today? You see, we all get to make this decision, we can either sit under our circumstances or we can sit on them, but we can’t do both. In the tomb this morning, that thing which was meant to bring defeat and bring closure, what the devil tried to stop Jesus with became the very thing the angel sat on top of. And so, the message of the angel is this, what you thought you couldn’t get through, what you thought you couldn’t do, has already been done because all power and authority belongs to Jesus Christ. And so, we just need to trust that God is working on whatever we’re worried about, believing number two, help is on the way.

## 2. Your Help Is on The Way

You see, often we don’t understand what’s happening as we’re going along, it’s like we can’t see the forest through the trees. And so, as these women are walking along, they realized the hopelessness of what they’re attempting to do. Recognizing their lack of strength and ability they become discouraged, but as they’re walking the angel was already on the way. And some of you need to recognize that your angel is already on the way, that thing you’ve been worrying about, just because you can’t see it yet doesn’t mean that it’s not in process.

You see, God does some of his best work in the dark and he wasn’t about to allow a stone stand in the way of Easter. He wasn’t about to let those women turn around and go back home with their spices. You see, Good Friday was a victory, but they just couldn’t see it yet. And so, as they got up early this morning and brought the spices down to the tomb, their efforts couldn’t end in failure. Help was on the way and when they arrived at the tomb the angel said,

*"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. But go, tell his disciples and Peter…" (Mark 16:6-7).*

Those last two words really struck me, that the very one who let Jesus down, the one who disappointed Jesus the most was singled out. The angel said, go tell Peter to get fishing out of his system, go tell Peter to get ready because I’m going to need him in 50 days. I want the one who failed me, the one who let me down, to be a demonstration of my grace.

There may be someone listening to me today who’s feeling the disappointment and discouragement of your own failure. My prayer is that this Easter you’re able to see the resurrection, not through the lens of your failure, but through the lens of God’s grace. Peter is such a beautiful example of this and in the same way, your story can’t end in failure either because God has promised his grace for every failure. In verse seven, the angel said, tell the disciples… and Peter,

*"He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you" (Mark 16:7).*

And so, the angel said your story can’t end here, it can’t end at the tomb, because there’s something more I want you to do. Tell the disciples to meet Jesus in Galilee and make sure you tell Peter. You see, failure in God’s economy is not the end, it’s not bankruptcy, failure is merely a doorway to allow you to experience his forgiveness at a greater level.

In verse eight, the women’s response is surprising. You know, I can understand them being disappointed when he died, but verse eight says,

*“Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid” (Mark 16:8).*

And this is amazing, because the original text of Mark’s gospel ended here. The last words of the first manuscripts ended with the words, “they were afraid” and that seems like such a crazy way to end the gospel. That’s the good news? That the women would flee from the tomb, trembling and bewildered, that’s not how I would expect it to end. But in the original oldest copies we don’t even see Jesus at all, we don’t see the risen Christ.

Now, we do see the resurrected Christ in the other Gospels, because they’re the same story told from different perspectives, they’re written for different audiences, and have different themes. But in Mark’s gospel there is no appearance of Jesus, there’s only an announcement, and yet isn’t that the essence of faith? The Bible says in Hebrews chapter 11,

*“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1, NKJV).*

And so, we walk by faith and not by sight and Mark’s gospel is a demonstration of faith, it’s not always visible, but just because you can’t see it doesn’t mean it’s not real. In Mark’s gospel the greatest demonstration of God’s power came at that moment when Jesus wasn’t where the women went to look for him. And sometimes faith is like that, but number three, something comes after verse eight.

## 3. Something Comes After This

If you’re reading along in your own Bible you may see verse nine through twenty, but you need to know that they were added much later. It was almost as if whoever was copying it thought that it couldn’t end like that. They knew there was something that comes after that, it was incomplete, and so scribes in the second century included some additional commentary. After being transcribed for centuries it remained because now we know from both Matthew and John that Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene, Luke tells us about Jesus appearance to the two disciples on the Road to Emmaus and how he appeared to the 11 and they didn’t believe it at first. But even today your Bible may still include these words following verse eight:

[The most reliable early manuscripts and other ancient witnesses do not have Mark 16:9-20.]

But we know there’s something that comes after this, there’s something that comes after verse eight, and so we know we’ve got to get to the part where he told them that:

*“Those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues” (Mark 16:17).*

Something comes after this, so we’ve got to get to verse 20 where it says,

*“Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it” (Mark 16:20).*

This is what’s so amazing about Easter Sunday, even though Mark’s gospel ends with the women fleeing from the tomb because they were afraid. We know that there’s something that comes after that, in fact, Matthew tells us,

*“Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted” (Matthew 28:16-17).*

Yes, even then some of the disciples doubted, this wasn’t just the 11 disciples, they all went, all the disciples went and some doubted. Because this is where the real people are, this is where we question the nature of faith, wondering if it’s a matter of imagination, or the ability to ignore disbelief, but true faith, saving faith, is a matter of interpretation. In verse 18,

*“Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Matthew 28:18).*

And so, faith is not a denial of reality, it’s acknowledging that Christ has all authority, it’s a deeper reality than what we see, because his authority includes both heaven and earth, his authority governs the way that we live. This is the essence of faith, it’s not always visible, and there was a profound and unmistakable absence of Jesus in the place where his body was laid. Mark’s gospel tells us the stone was rolled away, Matthew tells us an angel of the Lord rolled back the stone and sat on it in a demonstration of God’s power.

And so, as we close, there may be some of you who need to respond to that tugging on your heart, Christ’s invitation to come. Some of you need to take ownership of this grace, you need to stop doubting, because there’s something that comes after this. And you need to step up because the Bible tells us in Ephesians chapter 2, verse six,

*“God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:6).*

Jesus paid the price on Good Friday, he paid the debt that you couldn’t pay, he paid a debt that he didn’t owe and he invites you, he begs you to come and be seated with him. Some of you have been in the back row for too long, it’s time to move to the front lines, it’s time to be a contributor and not a consumer. There’s another level that God is calling you to, he said all authority in heaven and on earth have been given to me, and so would you stand up in that authority, serving in his name? The Bible promises in Revelation chapter 3,

*“To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne” (Revelation 3:21).*

In other words, there’s a seat saved for you, you’ll be seated with Christ, you’ll sit with him on his throne. What was once faith will become sight, and so this is your cue, it’s time to move to the front and begin to trust God with your life. Jesus said, “To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne.”

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