

"He is Risen"

Jesus Christ is risen! Verse 6. He is risen! That's why we are all here today. This is the great truth of Christianity. He is risen. If there was no resurrection, there's no reason for us to be here, or on any Sunday.

As you know, there are four gospel accounts, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. They each record the details and aftermath surrounding the resurrection of Jesus. Mark is clearly the shortest in these 8 verses. They each tell us different aspects of the resurrection, with certainly various points of overlap. But in Mark's short account, he gives us the eye witness account of three women. In fact, that's the only eye witnesses he has given us. The testimony of women.

Now back then, in Jewish circles, the testimony of women was pretty much worthless. Jewish manmade laws basically had a provision that said that women's testimony was not to be legally received. In other words, to the Jews, a woman's testimony was worthless for legally establishing a fact. So why would Mark include them as the witnesses he tells us about? How would it help his case of telling us about Jesus? Well, he told us, because it was true. There's no other compelling reason. You wouldn't make up the fact that women were a part of the first witnesses of the empty tomb. The culture at that time may not have been wanting to give women the right of testimony, but obviously Jesus didn't have a problem with it. Of course, that's what our God so often does. He does great things with those that world despises.

And so Mark tells us the story of the first eye witnesses to the empty tomb. He draws us into the story of these three women. Mark shows us their loving devotion for Jesus as they go to anoint Jesus' body. Mark shows us the alarming discovery they make of the empty tomb. And Mark shows us the amazing revelation that they are given - that "he is risen!" And so this morning we will look along with Mark at the story of these three women's discovery on the Lord's Day. We'll look first at their loving devotion, then at their alarming discovery, and lastly at the amazing revelation. And as we consider their discovery and their response to Christ resurrected, we'll consider how we too are being called again today, this Easter 2009, to discover and respond to Christ resurrected.

Let's look first at the loving devotion of these women. Man, these women had stood by Jesus. In chapter 15, when it seems that Jesus' disciples had all forsaken him, we see these faithful women standing by. Chapter 15, verse 40, these three women were there when Jesus died. Chapter 15, verse 47, the women were there when Joseph buried Jesus, observing where he was buried. After Jesus was buried, of course, was the Sabbath, and so that essentially required them to leave the tomb until after the Sabbath. But now in verse 1 of chapter 16 we see their steadfast, loving devotion. You get the sense in verse 1 that they were just waiting for the Sabbath to end so they could get back to showing their devotion to Jesus. And so in verse 1, as soon as the Sabbath was over, they go and buy spices for Jesus in order to anoint his dead body with these spices. The Jewish Sabbath started and ended at sundown, so these women were probably out Saturday evening buying the spices so that they could go straight to the tomb the first thing in the morning.

And according to verse 2, that's exactly what they did. They didn't just get up early, they got up very early on that Sunday morning. They arrived at the tomb by sunrise, so that means they would have got up and started toward to the tomb before

the sunrise. I like verse 3, by the way. Here they get up *really* early, they're on their way to the tomb, and then they ask what they are going to do about the big stone in front of the tomb. How would they move it? In the previous chapter they had witnessed Joseph roll the stone in front of the tomb. Verse 4 said that the stone was *very* large. And not just that, these sorts of tombs had a groove where the stone was rolled into. That made it somewhat easy to roll the stone into the groove to close the tomb, but made it pretty difficult to roll it out of the groove in order to access the tomb. But the ladies in their persistent devotion aren't worrying too much about that. By talking about it along the way, it's telling us that it's a problem that they are aware of, but they are obviously hopeful that they'll find some solution along the way. I think this is an aspect of how persistent they are in their devotion to Jesus. If there's any chance to get to him as soon as possible, they'll hope for that chance.

And yet as much as they have a loving and loyal devotion here, it certainly seems more an act of devotion, than faith. Remember, they were coming that morning to anoint his dead body with spices. This was a common thing done to help with the odors from a decomposing body. Their actions are certainly loving. But they don't seem to be the actions of people expecting Jesus' imminent resurrection. We don't know what all was in their mind. Maybe they did hope for a resurrection. But that doesn't seem immediately clear from this passage. At the end of the day, they needed more than just loving devotion here to Jesus. They needed Jesus. They needed their Lord that they loved so much.

But then the women made an alarming discovery. Verse 4. Suddenly they discovered that the stone had been rolled back. The big stone they had worried about moving when they got there - it had already been moved. Jesus' tomb was already open that morning. At this point they were probably more surprised than anything. Who would have beat them to the tomb at that early in the morning? But then they go inside, verse 5, and that's when they become alarmed. Empty! The tomb was empty! No Jesus. No body.

But wait, there is a man here. A young man dressed in a white robe. Matthew and John's accounts tell us that the man was an angel. That's implied here by the white robe, which the other gospel accounts describe as a very brilliant white. Luke's gospel describes the garment as shining. But Mark's description shows as much restraint as possible. I think it draws us into the perspective of these women. They saw the rolled away stone. They saw the empty tomb. They saw the young man sitting here. But at first did they really know what to think? Was the first thing that crossed their minds that this must be an angel and that Jesus must be resurrected?

I don't think so. Verse 5 tells us very plainly what they were feeling. They were alarmed. The angel in the next verse tells them not to be alarmed. But how could they not be? What did all this mean?

You see, the discovery of an empty tomb and a rolled away stone wasn't enough for them. This evidence alone wasn't enough. Evidence needs to be interpreted. We've already seen their great devotion and love for Jesus. But what we haven't seen for sure was faith. We didn't necessarily see faith in them that Jesus would rise on the third day. If they did have that sort of faith, then they'd probably not be so alarmed and distressed here. They didn't know what to think. But their alarm seems pretty practical. If you come home from a vacation and your front door is standing wide open and you walk inside and your fancy TV is gone, you probably get alarmed. You think someone broke in and stole it. You probably don't think that some supernatural event happened and you are just waiting for God to replace it with a brand new big screen TV. Well, the alarm of these women seems pretty

practical too. Frankly, they probably thought someone moved or stole the body. The other gospels bring out this concern of them. John's account shows them wondering who might have taken the body. We just don't see them initially respond with, "Wow! Praise the Lord, Jesus Christ is risen!"

No, instead they needed a revelation. And that is what they received. They were given amazing revelation. This is revelation sent from above in the form of this angel dressed in white. Jesus had sent a messenger to meet those three women on that Easter Sunday morning. It was this angel that would give these three women the interpretive grid they needed. They had seen the initial evidence of the resurrection but they didn't instantly make the connection. And so it will be through this angel that Jesus would explain things to them. But isn't this the way our salvation works? Before we become a Christian we are blind to the truth. We need God's work in our lives to give us understanding. For us that's by the Holy Spirit working inside us. The Spirit gives us eyes to see and ears to hear. The Spirit gives us understanding. God opens our minds so that we can begin to interpret the evidence according to his perspective.

And that's what God does here with these three women through the means of an angel. God had a messenger there waiting for them. There were angels there at Jesus' birth proclaiming the coming of the Savior. Now there are angels at the tomb coming with more good tidings. With more good news. He is risen! He is risen! Look, he's not here. That's where they laid him. But you made a mistake. You came looking for the living among the dead. But Jesus Christ is alive!

This was not some allegorical resurrection as some today might want to say. But that's revisionist history. No, this is a historical, bodily, factual, actual, resurrection. Just look at the way the young man in white describes it. You seek *Jesus of Nazareth*. The one *who was crucified*. Historical facts. A historical person. The historical person, the historical human Jesus is who they sought. The one historically from the town of Nazareth. The one who had undeniably been crucified just the Friday before. The angel makes sure everyone's on the same page. The human who we all knew, who you all saw die on the cross. That human, that real human, he is alive. Why? Because he is risen! He's been raised from the dead!

And so Jesus' resurrection was not just some allegory. Nor was it just some spiritual resurrection. No, his body wasn't in that tomb, because he had been raised bodily. Raised to new life. New resurrection life. This was an amazing revelation. This message was meant to transform their alarm into joy. The women were alarmed at their discovery of the empty tomb. But the messenger says, "Don't be alarmed." This is nothing to be alarmed about. I instead have amazing news for you! The angel sent by God tells them how to interpret the evidence. The miraculous had happened!

But there was more. The messenger now wanted the women to become messengers. Jesus would now send a message through them, to the disciples. The good news continued. Jesus didn't just rise from the dead, but he was also going to be reunited to his disciples. He was going to restore them. Remember, they had all fled when he was arrested. Peter himself had denied him three times. The disciples who had followed Jesus so faithfully everywhere he went, all forsook him when he needed them the most. Even though all the disciples had vowed loyalty, they had each vowed that they were ready to die for him, they all fell short when they fled in fear before Jesus' captors.

But now Jesus had a message of reconciliation. He had a message of reunion for them. He would restore them. Now this they should have known. Verse 7. "But go,

tell His disciples -- and Peter -- that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you." Jesus had promised them already that this would happen. Back in Mark 14:28 Jesus had told them specifically, that after he was raised, he would go ahead of them to Galilee. Jesus told the disciples back in Mark 14 that they would all fall away from him, but that afterwards, after the resurrection, he'd be reunited with them at Galilee. And so now was the time for the promised reunion. And so Jesus sends this message with the women off to the disciples.

And a special message is given for Peter. "And Peter," the angel had said. Mark highlights that it was Peter above everyone that vowed loyalty to the death, and that it was Peter above everyone who so clearly denied Jesus three times. On the third denial Peter had even invoked a solemn oath and curse against himself if he was lying that he didn't know Jesus. But now there was forgiveness for the disciples, and even for Peter. That is why Jesus had come. To win forgiveness on the cross. To pay for sins on the cross. That he could restore all his wayward people. To turn unfaithful sinners into believing disciples. To turn even loyal devoted women into something more and better. Into messengers of faith, witnesses of the resurrection. Heralds of the good news that Jesus Christ is risen. And for them and for us, this means salvation.

That's what so significant about Jesus' resurrection. On Good Friday, we especially think about how Jesus became a sacrifice for sin on the cross. On the cross he took on the sins of the world, that whoever would believe in him could be forgiven. But if there is no resurrection, we'd have no hope of that salvation. If Jesus only died, then he did not conquer sin and death. He would not have victory over those enemies. But Jesus did rise again. And so for Christians, our life is about being identified with Christ. Did you hear that? A Christian's life is a life of faith, but it's a faith that identifies ourselves with Christ. We identify with him in his death on the cross. He took our place. He paid for our sin on the cross - he himself was sinless! But then we also identify with his resurrection. Though we die, if we are identified with Christ, we will live again. We will be raised to new bodies for eternity. Bodies that are no longer affected by sin and death. Bodies that don't break down. New resurrection life. And so Christians identify with Christ by faith. And we identify with both his death, and his resurrection. With Christ-crucified, and with Christ-resurrected. This is the amazing revelation that these three women began to receive that Easter morning. And it is the amazing revelation I declare to all of us today. If you have come here today not knowing Jesus as your Lord and Savior, I urge you to turn to him in faith today. Repent of your former life of sin, and in faith receive him as your Lord and Savior today. Trust in his death and resurrection. Believe in it. Call upon him. And the Bible says that if you do that, that you have become a new creation. You are now an adopted child of God.

Trinity Presbyterian Church, I'd like to close out this sermon today with two points of specific application from our passage. The first point of application comes from verse 7 with those words "as he said to you." The women are told to bring this message to the disciples, to have them meet Jesus in Galilee, just as he had said to them. Do you get the significance of this? In other words, the disciples weren't waiting in Galilee for him. They weren't at the empty tomb here first thing in the morning like these devoted women, and they weren't waiting in Galilee either. Jesus had told the disciples that he'd rise again and reunite with them in Galilee. Not only that, but Jesus had told them several times that he'd rise again from the dead. Mark's gospel records three specific times where Jesus predicted his death and resurrection (8:31, 9:31, 10:34). But do you see how the disciples had missed all of this? They missed the many predictions that he'd rise again. And they'd missed the promise that he'd reunite with them in Galilee.

Here, after the resurrection, Jesus so lovingly sends an angel to have the disciples reminded them of his promise. "As he said to you."

The disciples had missed the gospel that was right before their eyes and ears. Of course, Jesus in his teaching ministry was telling all of the Jews that very same thing: that they were missing what the Word of God was telling them. The Israelites had the very Word of God before them. All of the Holy Scriptures that they had spoke about Jesus. They talked about his mission of suffering. They talked about what his ministry would look like. But the people of God missed it. The disciples missed it, and God's chosen people missed it.

But there was good news that Easter morning. Salvation had come to the world on that day of resurrection. Even though the disciples had missed this promise of resurrection and reunion, Jesus would still bring it to them. He'd call them now, as the Lord of the resurrection, to Galilee. There he'd restore them, and commission them as his apostles to go out to the ends of the earth with the gospel.

And so my point of application here is this: Have you missed the gospel when it's been proclaimed to you? The disciples missed the gospel right before them at first. The Jews who witnessed Jesus' ministry missed it, and ended up rejecting him and crucifying him. But God used all this "sin," to bring about the greatest good. To accomplish salvation. And now he has been bringing the gospel to the ends of the earth. He's brought it even to you. For most of us here, this is not the first time the gospel has come to you. But have you missed it in the past? This is a question for both non-Christians and Christians? To the unbeliever, have you sat there before, year after year, hearing Easter messages, only to walk away missing the point? That you need Jesus as your Lord and Savior? Or to the Christian, has God been speaking to you through his Word on some issue in your life, and have you just missed the message? Let's pray that we'll have ears to hear what God is telling us, and a mind to understand it. And let's pray for faith. Faith that trusts in what even the eyes cannot see or what the mind struggles to believe.

The second point of application that I'd like to make comes from verse 8. This is the response of the women to the message that the angel told them. Verse 8 says, "So they went out quickly and fled from the tomb, for they trembled and were amazed. And they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid." They were afraid. Matthew's gospel tells us a little bit more. It says that they went out with fear and joy. Both fear and joy. But Mark only tells us about the fear. They were trembling, amazed, speechless, and afraid.

How could they not be? Who would have the categories of experience to deal with this sort of encounter? It would have been amazing enough to have encountered an angel. But that Jesus, after suffering so badly right in front of their eyes, could have conquered death? Jesus had died right before their eyes. They saw him buried. Now he was alive again? How could they not have responded like this? Surely this would have brought them to the ends of their emotional, physical, and mental stability.

Do you see how the reality of the resurrection *shook* them? It *deeply* affected them. Have you ever watched some profound moment in a movie that sent chills down your back, or maybe heard a moving speech that left you in awe? How much more were these three women affected by the revelation that "He is risen!" It left them as Mark left us, "They were afraid."

And so my point here is this: Does the message of Jesus' resurrection strike you in this way? Or have you maybe become jaded to the good news? That Jesus Christ died

on the cross to pay for your sins. He died. He *died*. And then he lived again. He rose on the third day. He *rose* from the dead. He became alive. He *is* alive. He lives forevermore. And we can live forevermore if we trust in him. He tells us that even though we die, we can live; forever. Have you become jaded to this? If you really believe it, how can this not floor us? How can this not leave us unsettled, with a healthy fear and awe of the LORD. Jesus died and rose again, so that we can have life.

I hope that today you will not "miss" Jesus. It's my prayer that this Easter message of Christ's resurrection will affect you dramatically again today, and every day. As you leave today, leave with a new found fear and joy in the Lord. The Lord who loves you so much that he came to die and rise again for you. Trust in him by faith. Amen.

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