

April 16, 2017 "This Is The Day" Mark 16:1-20

So here we are. This is the day. Easter Sunday 2017. The day on which we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Resurrection Day! To be sure, because of the way calendars are calculated, this is not the actual day. As you know, Easter can occur by modern mathematical principles anywhere from as early as mid March through to this time in April. The term Easter itself is Anglo Saxon for Spring. And it is a point lost on the secular modern mind that there was a time in history when the simplest way to describe the celebration of the resurrection was to say...it is in the Spring of the year. The two phrases, the resurrection of Jesus, and Spring time were synonymous. So according to the calendar....this year....this is the day!

And what this day brings before us, is the remembrance of events which happened in real time, in a real place, involving real people, and revealing in spectacular fashion the real God who made the heavens and the earth, who saved the people of this planet from their sins, who continues to be with us in the person of the Holy Spirit. On this day, we remember that Jesus was arrested on Thursday night, HE was crucified and died of HIS wounds on Friday, and on the Sunday morning, very early on the first day of the week HE rose from the dead, revealing to one and to all, that HE was who He said HE was. And HE did what HE said HE would do. HE saved, and continues to have the affect of saving sinners who place their faith in HIM.

I have chosen to read from the Gospel of Mark for several reasons. It is fundamentally recognized as the oldest of the Gospels. The first written record. This chapter of Mark is the reason for the season. Without this chapter, there would be no church. And

what I mean when I say there would be no church is not a reference to the institution or the organization. I mean there would be no circles of believers gathering to do what we do week in and week out. There would be no St. James, St. John's, no Gathering, no Bible Chapel, no St. Paul's. And there would have been no line of history leading dot by dot from Friday's crucifixion to this moment and this place...a line unbroken. A line of faith? Of course. A line of amazement? That is the testimony. A line of surprises? Absolutely. A line of experiences that convinces people including ourselves that God is real? The only word I can think of that applies...is the word Yes!!!

What happened way back then, is the reason we are what we are. Disciples, that is students and followers of Jesus. The power and the reality of the resurrection is the only way you can meaningfully explain what happened then, and it is the only way you can explain the continued existence of a working, believing, current faith community. The resurrection of Jesus is the reason we are here and here today. It is the reason we are the way we are. And who we are. This is the day that causes us to say, praise God, and Hallelujah. Jesus is risen.

It was early on the Sunday morning. Just after sunrise, that Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of Jesus, and Salome, went to the tomb that Joseph of Arimathea had provided for the burial of Jesus body. They carried with them the spices with which they hoped to anoint the dead body of their crucified teacher whom they called Master and Lord. They discussed the problem they would face when they got there. The stone doorway to the tomb is circular and it is large. It rolls in a grooved track. The track is carved out of the rock face of the cave so that it rolls downhill. It is large. It is heavy. And

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gravity keeps it closed unless you have the tools and the manpower to move it.

Two important details to notice. The women brought the spices because they expected that they would be dealing with a body. A dead body. The spices will mitigate to some extent the stink of rotting flesh, as the day heats up and nature begins to take its course of reducing flesh to dust. Secondly they acknowledged this task of anointing the body is going to be almost impossible to accomplish. The stone door was closed when the body was placed inside. In addition there is a seal placed on the tomb by the Romans. They know there will be a military detail in place to make sure the seal remains in place. Their lives by the way are on the line if that seal gets broken. They are there to see to it the body remains undisturbed. The soldiers are not there to help mourners.

So why do Mary and Mary and Salome make this journey on the first day of the week just after dawn? They are in the full throws of grief. A woman released from demonic influence, a mother's love, a woman who may have blood on her hands. We do not know for sure but the only Salome mentioned in the New Testament is the one who danced for Herod and the instigation of her mother asked when Herod promised to reward her, for the head of John the Baptist on a plate...John who had baptized Jesus and said of HIM "there is one who comes after me whose sandals I am unworthy to untie." Three women who had very personal reasons for being devoted to Jesus. He had changed their lives. They have made this journey to the tomb to attempt the impossible.

For them as for every follower of Jesus this is a day of discovery. Three details. The stone is rolled away. Seal broken.

Second. The military detail is gone. Third, there is no body in the tomb, although there is a messenger, a young man in a white robe, who alarms them with his presence and his message. I said (because the women said) the stone was big. I don't mean 6 feet tall. Because it is what it is it represents tonnage. The tomb at the village of Nazareth that I entered was capable of holding 42 college students from Wisconsin. But I had to get down on my knees to enter and to exit it. It makes absolute sense to me that the women would be alarmed and one element of that is surprised, to find this young man in white awaiting their entry.

The angel delivers his message..."Don't be alarmed." The KJV says the message began, "Be not affrighted." Be not afraid. Because they were afraid. 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. Go and tell His disciples and Peter. He is going ahead of you into Galilee." And Mary and Mary and Salome did not say, O that's nice! They are so upset they are trembling, obviously bewildered, and they crawl out of the tomb, as I crawled out of the replica, and they fled. And fear was the major and lasting thing they experienced.

Now there is a note in our pew Bibles which represents an attempt at honesty but which is also misleading. Like a footnote in scholarly works it says in a different font of print, the earliest manuscripts and some other ancient witnesses do not have Mark 16:9-20. That portion tells us that the first appearance of Jesus, risen from the dead, was to Mary Magdalene. And that she went and told the disciples that Jesus is alive. It also includes the appearance of Jesus to the 11 and that HE rebuked them for not believing the message of Mary Magdalene. It also contains Mark's version of the

Great Commission, sending the 11 into all the world to preach this good news to everyone who exists.

The manuscripts in question that lack this ending are two in number. Some scholars in the late 20th and early 21st centuries have concluded these verses 9-20 are not authentic. But I am not willing to concede that point. There are many ancient copies of Mark in Koine Greek, the international language of the market place, in the whole of the Roman Empire including Judea. All of the other ancient manuscripts do include these verses 9-20. Secondly there is a grammar point to be noted. Verse 8 ends with the Greek word gar which means for (F-O-R). This word scarcely ever is used at the end of a sentence let alone the end of a book. In other words that word is evidence of more to follow. It is also important to note that Mark 9- 20 contains orthodox teaching. There is nothing here that is not in the other Gospel accounts. In other words, it is a stretch to conclude the verses 9-20 were added later by would be editors of the Mark's account.

It is like Easter, Resurrection Sunday itself. Honest scholarship cannot get back behind a time when the resurrection of Jesus was not among the fundamentals of what HIS followers believe. It is the reason that a set of disciples, Jewish in culture and faith, began worshiping within a week's time on Sunday instead of Saturday and clearly thought they were not setting aside or changing one of the 10 commandments....keeping the Sabbath holy. The church (small c) has always been from the time the stone was rolled away...a resurrection celebrating community. And that too is a matter of history. Jesus' appearance to two disciples on the Emmaus Road alluded to in verse 12 is told in more detail in Luke 24, The appearance of Jesus to the 11 is also told in more detail in Luke and

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in John, to the extent that in John it is an appearance to the 10 on the day of the resurrection, and 11 the next week when Thomas is present, and declares he would need evidence before he could believe Jesus is risen. And Jesus gives comes and gives the evidence and sweeps Thomas unbelief away.

Dear, dear friends. This is the day. The day of resurrection. The day that informs our faith and defines us as believers. Do we understand everything. No...emphatically no. Do we have no questions at all? Not if we are honest. I have lots. Like what was the reaction of the guards? How did it feel coming back to life? And how did the stone get rolled away? I would really like to know who actually did it? And what was the name of this angel that met Mary Magdalene? But all my questions assume what this day is about. He is risen. HE IS RISEN! This is the day.

Let us pray;

Lord we celebrate YOUR rising from the dead. We celebrate YOUR victory over death and the grave, won, not just for you but for us, for all who put their faith in YOU. Eternal life. That we might live as people who are not afraid to face the end of life on earth because YOU are the way to heaven. YOU are the living God. YOU are the Saviour and the Lord. Master lead us in what remains of our faith journey. Make use of our lives and our testimony, that others might know YOU are the One we serve. We ask it in the name of Jesus. Amen