

Let's open our Bibles this morning to the book of Mark, the gospel of Mark, 16:1 as we continue our studies through Mark.

Mark wrote this gospel as a disciple of Peter. He had gotten saved listening to Peter and had also heard from Peter all that Jesus had said and done in the ministry that He had had publicly. Mark was most moved by the heart of Jesus, and so he writes his book, his gospel, all about what Jesus did; not so much what He said but what He did, how He did it, how available He was, His passion for the lost, His sacrifices - endless zeal. And in chapter 10:45, there's a verse that says, " 'The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve,' " and that really becomes Mark's theme verse. And so we've been going through Mark for quite a while now.

We spent three Sunday mornings looking at the cross; last week considered some of the responses to His death - primarily two very silent disciples that show up now: Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus as well. And then looked at the ladies at the cross as we ended last week in verse 47 as the girls were there faithfully to the end. Joseph came to bring a tomb that he had nearby, Nicodemus brought a hundred pounds of burial spices - far more than you would ever need to bury someone; both of them trying to make up for lost time. We ended last week looking at Matthew, where the scribes and Pharisees asked Pilate to make the tomb secure. They remembered Jesus saying He would rise in three days, and so Pilate gave them some soldiers and said, "You can make it as sure as you can." The girls stayed, they watched where Jesus was laid, they had every intention to go back in the morning after the Sabbath day passed. For the disciples, it was horrible. I mean, between verse 47 and here, three days of absolute despair. They couldn't leave because of the travel restrictions for the Sabbaths and for the Passover. They wanted to go back to Galilee (most of them), try to put their lives back together. Jesus had said to them (in John 16:19), "Why are you asking yourselves what I meant by saying I would be gone? A little while and you'll see Me, and in a little while You'll see Me no more." And then He talked to them about their sorrow being turned to joy; and just like being a woman in labor, the minute that baby is born, she forgets all of her pain. And He said, "That'll be you. Your sorrow and your anguish will be turned into joy, and it'll be a joy that no one can take from

you." But that wasn't something that was happening those three days for them. They waited in horror. The words of Jesus on the cross, "It is finished!" meant something entirely different to them. For them it meant that their hopes were dashed, their plans were ended, their hope in the Lord and what He was going to do was finished. He had died. By the time you catch up with those two going to Emmaus in the afternoon of the resurrection day, they say to Jesus, as they were discouraged and sad, and the Lord hid Himself from them, asked them why they were so sad, and they said (Luke 24:17), "Have You not been paying attention at all to what's been going on in town? These things about Jesus, the prophet, mighty in word and in deed before God and the people, how the rulers took Him and they condemned Him to death. They had Him crucified. We were hoping He was going to be the guy! But He's not the guy. It is finished." It was finished for them as well.

However, by the time you get to chapter 16, to the words, "It is finished!" can be added three more words, "He is risen. He is risen." And this morning, we want to begin our look at the resurrection in three parts: morning, afternoon, evening. And then we'll spend a week looking at the commissioning of the disciples.

For sure, this chapter is at the heart of your faith and mine. There really is no way to have any hope if Jesus had stayed in the grave. The gospels are not a biography in the sense that it ends with His death. It is a living testimony that continues with His resurrection. So, the empty tomb is really the rallying cry of the church. It is what we hang onto and thank God for. In fact, there's lots to be learned at the resurrection. Watch around the resurrection the reaction of the people - from the faithful women who were there early, to Peter and John who got there a little bit later, to the disciples who were in hiding, to the folks on the Emmaus road, to Thomas who wouldn't show up at all. There're a lot of challenges - the Roman guards at the tomb, the religious leaders who heard what had happened. As a believer, the resurrection will satisfy you, it'll stir your heart, it'll get you to grab hold. This is the hope that you have, the resurrection. And it is the greatest miracle, certainly, in the Bible. It is essential to the teaching of the apostles. The early church wanted to make sure that everyone knew that Jesus was dead, and He was alive. Peter picked it as the center of his first sermon, there in Acts 2. Paul will continue to speak of it constantly in the epistles. But the evidence was in, and because He is alive, everything He said is true. And because He is alive, you have to answer for your life in light of what He has done.

So this morning we'll look at the first eleven verses, kind of filling in from some of the other gospels as well. We read in verse 1, "Now when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, that they might come and anoint Him. Very early in the morning, on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen." It should maybe be "Son" - I don't know. "Very early in the morning," John 20:1 adds "while it was still dark" that they set out. And the girls came first. They wanted to properly bury the Lord. It had been three difficult days of waiting. But they loved the Lord, and they didn't think whatever Nicodemus had done was enough. The Scottish preacher, Alexander MacLaren, wrote across these verses in his Bible, "Sorrow always rises early." If you've ever lost someone that you love, there can be lots of painful nights where you wake up and you just kind of lie there by yourself and have to relate to the suffering alone. And I think these ladies were anxious, in their love to just serve the Lord, and so "while it was still dark," as early as they could get out safely, they went. What they didn't know was that this day was going to turn out just fine. It was going to end up with a joy they'd never thought possible. But it started off somber enough, a task that had to be accomplished. Never mind the pain. It wouldn't bring Him back, but it would comfort their hearts. And they set out to find a corpse, not a risen Savior; they really expected to find a body. It is impossible to determine how many women went. We read a couple of names here - three of them. Luke adds (in chapter 24:10) that there was a lady named Joanna with them, and then he kind of throws in the catchall phrase, "and the other women with them."

But it is possible, from the gospel accounts, to get an order or a likely scenario of what took place in this morning. It does appear that the ladies set out all together first, before dawn. If there was any anger in their hearts towards Jesus having let them down, you certainly can't find it with them. All you find is real devotion, real commitment. And they're only concerned for His body, for how it was treated, for the honor that it was shown. John tells us (and you don't need to turn there) in chapter 20:1 that Mary Magdalene was the first one to get to the tomb. We assume that, because she started off with everyone together, she ran ahead. Maybe they were too slow for her. She was really anxious to get there. She was the one out of whom Jesus had cast seven demons. Luke writes of her that because she had been forgiven much, that's why she loved much (Luke 7:47). And so, for whatever pace these ladies were keeping, it wasn't fast enough for her. And so she runs ahead, and it very well - a mile and a half total - maybe she could have gotten far ahead. But when she gets to the tomb, John tells us that she saw

the stone rolled away, and she feared the worst. She thought there must have been some grave robbers or something, and so she doesn't even get into the tomb.

She turns around and runs back to where John lives. He had a house in town (John tells us), where Peter was staying as well, and (we suspect) Mary, Jesus' mother. And the boys respond by running to the grave. They don't wait for Mary. They're just off. Stole the body and off they go. And you might remember John's account (there in chapter 20); that John, who was almost 100 years old when he wrote this (Peter had been dead for quite a few years), happily records that he beat Peter to the tomb; guys never stop being guys, I guess. And he kind of tears off, he beats him there, and then you get these couple of verses where both Peter and John look into this empty tomb, and they see nothing. Well, they don't see any angels, anyway. And all of the different words for "saw" and "seen" are there in Greek. John looked in before Peter got there, and it says he "saw." The Greek word is "*blepo*." It means just to leave an impression on your retina; it doesn't really speak about any kind of cognitive response. It's just you saw what you saw. When Peter runs right by John into the tomb, it says that he "saw," but it's the word for "theory," "*theoreo*." It means to look at something with puzzlement or trying to put it together but not really understanding what you saw. Then Peter ran off, and John came back in and looked around, and the word for "saw" is the word "*horao*." It means to see with understanding. And it does seem like John, as he looked around and as he saw what was there, began to put two and two together - the handkerchief that he been around His head was lying in one place, the linen cloths folded up lying in another. And for John, it seemed to be enough. He went away, and the rest of the day would support what he had begun to believe - that maybe the Lord was alive. Peter was just baffled. But John began to kind of put things together. There was enough evidence to have this daunting faith, and he leaves, and Peter leaves, and Mary comes back, if you will, to the tomb, in tears. The ladies are still not there. So they are certainly going slowly.

We are told (in John 20:11) that Mary, as she came up to the tomb, stood outside weeping, and then she stooped down to look in, and she saw two angels sitting in white, one on the left, one on the right - one at the head, one at the foot of where Jesus had been. And they said to the woman, "Why are you weeping?" and I'm thinking it's a graveyard. Isn't that kind of a dumb question? And she said, "I'm weeping because they've taken my Lord away. I don't know where they've put Him, where they've taken Him." And when she said this, she was done talking to angels because when you're looking for the Lord, angels that are all glowing doesn't it's

not good enough for you. And she runs into Jesus, who is standing there, but she doesn't know it's Jesus, and John says she thought He was the gardener. That should ruin a lot of your gold-embossed pictures of the risen Christ - rake, hat, weed whacker. And she said, "Sir, if You know where they've taken Him, if You could just tell me, I'll come get Him." And only love talks like that. She's not going to be able to carry a dead man's body. And she's just devoted.

Jesus, in His risen form, was probably pretty much the same as before but yet quite different as well. He would appear, over the next forty days before the ascension, to lots of folks; not only this day and the days that followed but, at one point, over 500 in all, together. And, at least for the instances that we are given in the Bible, no one seemed to recognize Him immediately - whether it was Mary here, whether it was those folks on the road to Emmaus, whether it was the seven disciples in John 21 that were fishing, and they finally figured out that was the Lord. But they couldn't go by what they saw, which is interesting because God's relationship with us is one of revelation. Right? It isn't something that you can just look and understand. God has to show you who He is and reveal Himself to you. And when Peter finally said (there up in Caesarea Philippi - Matthew 16:16), "You're the Christ, the Son of the living God," it was Jesus that said, "Flesh and blood hasn't revealed that to you, but My Father in heaven." And that's pretty much how everyone gets saved. Right? God opens our eyes that we might see who He is. And so after the resurrection, that physical identity wasn't sufficient. People didn't look at Jesus and go, "Oh, there's Jesus!" No one seemed to get it because He was hidden from the eyes of everyone, and yet the believers would soon see Him and understand who He was.

And so Mary didn't think Jesus; she thought gardener. And Jesus stopped her, and He just said, "Mary!" and He did it, I guess, in such a tone that only He could say it like that. And rather than anything else, she kind of just dove at His feet, called Him, "Rabboni!" or Teacher, and got a death grip on Him like, "You're not leaving again." He was alive. And it was the Lord who really told her that she needed to let go, that this wasn't going to be the relationship that they've had from now on. It would be one of faith and not sight. Paul would write that later on as well. "We know the Lord not by what we see but by what we know" (2 Corinthians 5:7). And so Jesus said to her, "Don't cling to Me. I haven't gone to My Father yet. You go tell My brethren that I'm ascending to My Father and to your Father and to My God and to your God." His work completed, there's a way, now, to my Father in heaven through Jesus. And so she is the first one to see the Lord, and she's the

first one to be commissioned to go tell others. Here's the reward for her faithfulness - Jesus shows her first that He's alive, and pretty soon the other ladies, who are really slow, will get theirs as well. So she runs off to tell the others.

Now Mark 16:9 says, "Now when He rose early on the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven demons. She went and told those who had been with Him, as they mourned and wept. And when they heard that He was alive and had been seen by her, they did not believe." She was the first to see Him alive. She was the first to see the unbelief of the people who should have known better. So her testimony falls on these kind of unbelieving, deaf ears and hearts.

Well, we read here in Mark 16:3, "And they said among themselves," (now we go back to the ladies from verse 2), " 'Who will roll away the stone from the door of the tomb for us?' But when they looked up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away - for it was very large." By the time that "the sun had risen" (verse 2), the ladies arrive at a very busy tomb. By the way, the reason the church meets on Sunday morning is just this - we meet because the resurrection was on Sunday morning. It doesn't mean you can't be in church more often and worshipping every day. But this is the start of worship on Sundays because of the resurrection. They had been worrying, as they walked, about the stone, wondering how they could move it since the grave mouth had been sealed. But even that wasn't keeping them away, which is interesting to me. Love doesn't know anything logical. Right? They arrived, and notice in verse 4, it says "very large." The estimation, because of the channel that is in front of the empty tomb today, would receive a stone that would weight about two tons. So this wasn't something a couple of girls were going to move. But that didn't seem to slow them down, even though (notice in verse 4) it says, "it was very large." And in Greek, it says "very large." It was a big stone. Matthew tells us (back in chapter 28:2) that, before they arrived, "there was a great earthquake; because an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, he rolled back the stone from the door, and he sat down upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and his clothes white as snow. And the guards shook for fear of him, and became like dead men." The stone was rolled away, not by any knowledge of the girls, but the Lord rolled the stone back. He sent an angel to do it. I love the description. He rolls the stone back, and then he sits on it, kind of like, "Ta da! Look what I just did!" I don't quite understand. But he didn't roll it back to let Jesus out. Jesus comes in through locked doors, right? He rolled it back to let

the girls in. And so, even before Mary Magdalene had showed up, that stone had been rolled away; the earthquake had moved it as the angel came. And the angel sat, glowing. He was kind of a reflection of where he'd been. Right? It's kind of like Moses when he came down from the mountain. He had to hide his face. It was glowing because of the LORD and who he'd been around. When Peter and John stand before the Sanhedrin (down the road here in Acts 4), they took notice these guys had been with Jesus. They weren't smart men. They were unlearned men. But they'd been with Jesus. And I thought about that a lot. You know, so often when people see us, I hope they realize who you've been around; and you can shine for the Lord. Certainly Jesus, at the transfiguration, just made Himself known.

Well, whatever the earthquake did, it frightened these hardened guards; so much that they fell into a coma of fear. They were "like dead." I don't know what was shaking worse, the ground or them. But when they wake up (Matthew 28:11 tells us), they went into the town to report to the chief priests everything that had happened. They said, "Oh, man. You ain't gonna believe this." And they told their stories to the priests, the ones who had had them hired or got them sent out by Pilate. Apparently a guard and a seal aren't enough to keep Jesus in the grave. I would love to see the faces of these tough guys giving the report. And so Matthew tells us there was another quick emergency meeting held at the level of the Sanhedrin, where they talked about, "Is this ever going to end? I mean, how long do we have to put up with this?" Their worst fears were realized. They had said to Pilate (Matthew 27:64), "Set a guard so that His last deception will not be worse than the first, and we'll be even worse off than when we started." And so they listened to the story. They weren't moved by the truth. I would think at some point they'd go, "They're not all making this up." The earthquake certainly would have been felt in a lot of places there. But, rather than believing the truth, they spring for big bucks; and it's big bucks this time - it says so. Bribe money. They tell the guards, "Here's the story you should tell. Their disciples came and stole Him away. Here's the insurance that we'll give you. If you are prosecuted for your failure to protect the tomb, we will take care of you." And the soldiers (we are told in Matthew 28:15) took the money, and they went around telling what they had been told to say. Matthew writes that (at the time of his writing which was about thirty years later - in the early 60 ADs) the prevalent story still running through town was that grave robbers, probably His disciples, had come and stolen His body. That was still the explanation thirty years later.

If you go on the internet and type "resurrection of Jesus" and find the page of people that don't believe in it and won't, you'll read all kinds of nonsense. But if you're not going to face the fact that He's alive, which means then you don't have to listen to what He has to say, you're going to have to come up with another explanation. The fact that He rose from the dead means everything He said about you and me was true, as well as what He said about Himself. That makes you responsible. And a lot of folks would rather avoid that completely. The resurrection. So important was it that these men wanted to silence it. It couldn't be out. It would ruin their planning and their plotting. Like I said, Peter used it as the theme of his first sermon on Pentecost. Paul makes it the centerpiece of literally every message that he preaches. The resurrection is mentioned well over a hundred times in the New Testament. Paul will say to the Corinthians (in 1 Corinthians 15) that if Christ isn't risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is empty, too. If He didn't rise, then any hope you have of living beyond this life is futile, and you'll be the most miserable person of all. If there's no resurrection, we ought to just eat and drink and be merry because why bother living in a hope for something that cannot come or will not come. And so they set it aside, hoping for the impossible.

Well we read here, in verse 5 of Mark 16, "And entering the tomb, they saw a young man clothed in a long white robe sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed." As the ladies entered the tomb, Luke 24:3 says they didn't see Jesus there at the tomb (as Mary had), but they saw an angel. Now Luke mentions two angels; Mark, here, only mentions one - that he was sitting there. Notice in verse 5 that he was "a young man." I just wanted to mention to you when I get to glory, I'm going to look like a young man as well. (Laughing) Angels look like young men. I like reading that. It should be encouraging to all you old guys. "But he said to them," verse 6, " 'Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him.' " So, Luke says two angels; Mark only speaks about the one that spoke up. They were frightened. Luke 24:5 says that they fell on their faces and hit the pavement, just in fear. The angel says to them, "Don't be alarmed," verse 6. "You're looking for Jesus, right? The One who was crucified." Luke 24:5 adds him saying, " 'Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen!' " " 'Here, come look where He is laid' " (Mark 16:6). And they had come looking for a corpse, but now they hear Jesus is alive. And so the angel says to them (Luke 24:6), " 'You remember how He was with you, that He spoke to you and said He'd meet you in Galilee and that "the Son of Man had to be delivered into the hands of sinners and be crucified, and He

would rise again on the third day"?' " And then it says, "Then they remembered what He had said." So the angel kind of preaches at them, right, or reminds them of what the Lord had told them.

And he then said, in 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.' " And so, "Go let people know." Just like Mary Magdalene. "Go let people know, but be sure that you tell Peter." Isn't it cool to you that the guy who had the hardest time gets singled out? I think the Lord knew that if there was somebody having a bad three days, Peter was probably the worst. He had loudly and more than once, with yelling and screaming, denied that he even knew the Lord. And yet, "Go tell Peter, in particular. Let Peter know personally that the Lord is alive." He needed to hear it most. Look at the way this works. "Come and see where they have laid Him. Go and tell." It's always the way it works. You come and see what God has done, and once you understand what He's done, then you go tell others what He has done.

And so we read, in verse 8, "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." Now apparently, again putting the gospel accounts together, they left just running. They were slow getting there, but they were quick getting out of there. And initially out of fear, they said nothing. But Luke 24:8 adds that, as they were going, they thought about what the angel had said to them, and they turned, and they went to tell others. And, again, as they arrived where the twelve were hiding (and others), it says that their words sounded like idle tales to those gathered. Mary Magdalene was set aside. "No, we don't believe." These folks, these ladies coming back, as well. We read (in Matthew 28:8), "So they went out quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to bring His disciples word. And as they went to tell His disciples, Jesus met them and said, 'Rejoice!' So they came and held Him by the feet and worshipped Him. Then Jesus said to them, 'Do not be afraid. Go and tell My brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see Me.' " And so the girls, on the way to do what the Lord told them to do, get to meet Jesus second. And there, again, that reward of faithfulness as they go forward, and Jesus reiterates the instructions to them the same.

I always think about what would have happened if the girls had slept in this morning. It's an interesting thought to me. They get up before dawn, and they're off. Okay. Mary's quicker and driven by a life that has been cleansed by the Lord in maybe greater ways than they felt theirs were. But they got up early. Right?

What if they'd have just said, "I'm tired, it's cold, I'm depressed, He's dead, what difference does it make?" I wonder if they'd have come with the same discovery. It's not such a bad idea to get up in the morning, get your Bible out, and sit down and pray a little while, and let the Lord minister to you early on. It's the most important meal of the day, you know. But you can miss out on a lot sleeping in. I guess I'm singing to the choir because you guys are here at 8:00 in the morning. To the third service, I will raise my voice. (Laughing) Don't tell 'em I said anything. I'll deny it.

We read in Luke that these men and women hiding were in great despair; that, unless you were out early and seeking the Lord, like Mary, the ladies, and even Mary got Peter and John moving, there were 120 (at least, according to Acts 1) that were hiding in these upper rooms, and they were not willing to listen to what the reports were. In fact, the word "*leros*," in Greek, idle, means nonsense; it's a medical term that would describe someone that's just babbling incoherently. They saw every report of the resurrection as, "Maybe the women are just overwrought with emotion. Maybe you should just lie down and get some rest. Maybe get you some aspirin." They reacted to the news as if it really was nonsense. When the couple on the road to Emmaus (who we'll see next Sunday, Luke 24) - and by the way, who Jesus spent the entire afternoon with, into the evening - when they expressed their doubts and all, they said to the Lord there, as they were making the accounts, "Some of the ladies came back and told us that they had seen an empty tomb and that they had seen the Lord. And so we sent some of the men to check it out, but they didn't find anything. And so that didn't help us at all. The women said they saw it; the guys said, 'No way.' " So I think they wrote the ladies off as just kind of emotionally missing it. But they didn't miss it. Thomas is the only guy who doesn't come at all. He's not hiding with them, he's not waiting with them, he doesn't get to hear with them. By the time the evening rolls by, he's not around. He's a loner and kind of pushed off to himself. Now, before you're too hard on Thomas, remember he needed as much proof as everyone else. It's just he's the last guy, but he's certainly not the first. By the time that the evening will roll around, many will be believing and listening and following the Lord.

And so the morning was spent meeting the girls, assuring guys like John. At some point during the day, Jesus meets with Peter. We have not got it recorded other than we have the testimony of the Emmaus road couple coming back in the evening to this upper room and saying (Luke 24:34), "And He appeared to Peter also," which almost - either Peter didn't tell them, and maybe he did, but they were told that, in

some place, by the Lord - that He had met with Peter as well. So, the morning is all about verification. The afternoon was all about the teaching of the Scriptures and the centrality of the resurrection. The evening's all about getting guys ready to go out and do the work. "I've begun this work. Let Me fill you to do a work in the days and weeks and months to come." And by the time Pentecost rolls around and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and the baptism of the Holy Spirit, there's a church ready to go forward to continue the work that Jesus began. His work will be done. Forty days, He'll ascend, if you will, and the disciples will be left to wait for the empowering of the Spirit and then to be sent out. So the work of Jesus is certainly nearly done, but this resurrection morning was all about the reward for faithful service, the help in believing those who had great doubts, the restoring of joy to those who wailed and mourned. It's kind of that way with us, I think. When you meet the Lord who is alive, when you realize what He has done, man, hope springs eternal then, doesn't it? God has provided a way for us to raise from the dead as well.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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