

# Hopkins South Monterey

## United Methodist Church

Affecting Lives Through Jesus Christ

Scripture & Sermon

April 4, 2021

Pastor Kelsey

### Mark 16:1-8

**16** When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. **2** And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. **3** They had been saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" **4** When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. **5** As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. **6** But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. **7** But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you." **8** So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

### Prayer & Sermon

*God of love and new life,*

*Thank you for this time to be together. Thank you for this time with you. Bless this time we have to spend with your Word. Help us to hear what you know we need to hear, and help us to put what we learn about you and ourselves into action. In the name of the Son and Spirit, Amen.*

Have you ever thought about how incredible a sunrise is? And I don't mean in a, "the beauty is the most glorious thing" kind of way, though that side is incredible too. For sunrises to happen, all of these big mechanics of the solar system are working together. The earth is spinning at 1000 mph, traveling an orbit of 584 million miles around a star that's about 1 million times the size of our planet. From all that distance the light then interacts with our atmosphere to make beautiful colors streak across the sky. When I think about huge space things like that, my brain goes a bit mushy. I can talk about the mystery and wonders of God who we can't directly see for days, but throw talks of space and physics, and my mind is blown. Despite the reality of the science behind a sunrise being a bit mind blowing, we aren't usually very impressed by sunrises. Y'know,

we expect them every day (and they come every day, whether we can see it through the clouds or not), and really, most of us are probably asleep through most of them! But when we take a second to really think about all that has to happen for us to get those sunrises, it starts to feel a lot more awesome and miraculous.

Easter can be a bit like sunrises. Especially for those who have been part of the church for many years, or most their life, or their whole life. Think about it for a second. How many Easters have you celebrated in your life? How many Easters have you heard the resurrection story? How many Easter sermons have you heard (no matter if you remember anything about them)? For probably most of us here, we know the story, at least the basic story taught in Sunday School. We may have woken up this morning the same way that we always do. But, this day is a bit different, as this past week we have walked the journey with Jesus from Palm Sunday, to the Last Supper, to the Cross on Good Friday. This is not just another Sunday and it doesn't have to be just another Easter. If we allow ourselves to really hear the story, put ourselves in the shoes of those women at the tomb or the Disciples hiding out in the upper room, we can experience the story anew.

Reading the Resurrection story from the Gospel of Mark can seem like a bit of a strange way to go about that. I'll take a guess that most of you don't spend a lot of time thinking about how each of the Gospel accounts of the resurrection are a bit different. Not everyone can be a Bible scholarship nerd like us pastors and seminarians! The story we are used to thinking about when we think of Easter, is the condensed version of the story that pulls the details from all the Gospels. Though all have important perspectives to teach us about that first Easter, today we are focusing on only one of them, the depiction at the very end of Mark. Mark is known to be the most concise of the Gospels and to be very straightforward in the story telling. That is certainly still the case even with what we now consider one of the most important stories in the Bible. Mark does not give us any extra details of the Resurrection, and in the original form of the book, it didn't go on any past what was just read aloud to you. In fact, in the original Greek, the book ends with an open ended "Because" with nothing further. Because of where it stops, and the real emotions of the women who went to the tomb that we hear about, this telling of the Resurrection does not have a lot of joy in it either. But it is Easter! Isn't it supposed to be the most joyful day? It has been thought of as that by a lot of Christians through the years, but on that original day? That day that the women found the tomb empty? It was a lot heavier.

That original Sunday morning was not a day full of celebration for those closest to Jesus. They started the day in profound grief over the loss of their friend and leader, and the hope they had in Jesus being the mighty Messiah they always predicted. Let's take a second and put ourselves in their shoes. Think about the first few days after you've lost someone you care about. What does it feel like in those few days between their death and the funeral? There's no closure yet, time is out of whack, you can't think of much else, but it also doesn't really feel real yet, getting to sleep is hard but welcome relief from the swarm of thoughts, but then waking up means having to realize the truth all over again. When you are really taken by grief, the morning is when you have to convince yourself to face the day. It is in that fog of grief that the women carry with them

to the tomb. They didn't yet have closure as all they were able to do with Jesus's body was wrap it in a cloth and stick it in the tomb before they had to observe Sabbath. They knew they had to do something with their grief, and unlike those men who had fled from the cross and denied Jesus, they faithfully continue drawing near to Jesus. Though it would be emotional and hard to do, they knew the importance of trying to prepare Jesus's body for a proper burial. All of us who have lost someone during this pandemic, from COVID or not, might have an even better idea of what the women and all of the Disciples were feeling in that day of waiting through the Sabbath. They were stuck with their hands tied by rules that they typically agree to following, that are also enforced by the governmental authorities. They were stuck with having to sit and do nothing except think about the loss that they had experienced and realize they wouldn't get to have the kind of celebration of Jesus's life like they would want to put on due to the climate of things between the Romans, Jewish leaders, and the Jesus followers. The women decide that even if they can't have the choirs sing and the major funeral luncheon out of their fellowship hall, they were still going to do a part of the rituals that honor the dead and brings closure for those left behind.

They headed out to that tomb at dawn hoping they would be able to anoint Jesus's body. They did not expect to witness the resurrection, or an empty tomb, or to even check on if the rumors of resurrection were true. They were expecting to see Jesus's body, marred from crucifixion and showing signs of decomposition. On their way to the tomb they were probably mentally preparing themselves to face that reality and with it maybe re-experience the terror of that past Friday. Perhaps they were bracing themselves to face the reality of their grief. On top of that swirl of emotions, it is important to note here, these women were showing up to the tomb with the hopes to do this death ritual while the reality of that tomb set-up means that they were unlikely to actually get into the tomb. In reading the story again this year, I noticed a detail I had never paid much attention to, verse 3 gives us a piece of their discussion on their walk to the tomb, it says, "They had been saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" A bit of a blueprint of these tombs. As the scripture said, the tomb itself was like a cave carved out of rock. To close the tombs, they would use round stones, as we hear in Jesus's story. But they didn't just roll them into place and call it good. To keep the stone in place, they would dig out a hole or little trench that the stone would be rolled into, and they would make it so precise to the door stone that the stone would sit into the trench and its own weight would basically wedge it in there, effectively sealing the tomb. This big stone would have weighed tons and could not have been move by a single person, nonetheless, three people that do not have the strength of hard laborers. They went out to this tomb at dawn with the hope that it would work out, but not actually knowing how they would get in there. They knew that they had to do something with their grief to honor Jesus.

But wait. They don't arrive to what they expected. When they get there, they find the stone removed and a strange young man inside telling them an outlandish story. We have heard this story so many times now that it probably doesn't sound so strange to you as we read it this morning, but those women were experiencing it for the first time. Can you imagine being them, walking up to the tomb, brainstorming among yourselves how in the world you are gonna move that giant stone, to find it just open, rolled away?

Have you ever come home from the store and found the garage door or your back door open or unlocked when you would swear you closed it on your way out? You get nervous! Right? Chapter 15, in the verses that come right before the start of the story we read today, say, Joseph of Arimathea had the stone rolled into place and “Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus saw where the body was laid.” Mary Magdalene who is now returning to the tomb had seen Jesus’s body laid in there. She had seen the stone rolled into place with much effort. They were not expecting to walk up to the tomb and find that huge stone rolled away. At this point, I imagine they slowed their walk, shared some looks between them, and tip-toed toward the open door. If this was happening today, I would imagine these women would have been holding their bags of spices close and holding their keys between their fingers, ready to fight back against any trouble. They probably thought they would find grave robbers or maybe some Jesus haters coming to disrupt the tomb.

As much as they were not expecting to see the tomb open, it may have been even more surprising to peak in and see a young man in a white robe sitting there. Inside the tomb they were expecting to find Jesus’s prone body, yet instead is this strange young man, lounging about in what they designated to be Jesus’s final resting place. Of course they were alarmed! This random, strange man they did not know from Adam, then has the audacity to tell them, “Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.” Okay dude, first, you say do not be alarmed like that will actually help decrease our alarm. Yeah right. Second, uh, you don’t need to tell US who Jesus is, giving his full title like we are strangers. Excuse me, we were there when he was crucified and we are the ones who stayed for the whole thing and have remained loyal to him. Third, way to state the obvious. Obviously Jesus isn’t here! We can see where his body isn’t! Fourth, now you don’t be alarmed, we will have no trouble telling our friends about the experience with the weird dude and Jesus’s body missing! See ya!

Silliness aside, this is justifiably a terrifying experience for them. Both because this was very unexpected, disrupted all of their expectations for their visit to the tomb, and ends with them realizing that if that weird dude was messing with them, the body of their beloved leader and Messiah was MISSING. Without anything for them to do at the tomb now, and fully stirred up by the experience they did have, they fled from the tomb, still wrapped in terror and amazement. The text ends by saying they “said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.” We obviously know they did tell others, as the longer accounts of the resurrection share about it and we know that the news of the resurrection did spread, or else we wouldn’t be here today.

A bit of a downer gospel writer Mark! You just shared a whole bunch of grief and pain and fear, and we are supposed to get any Easter joy out of THAT? Well, yeah. We can. Though this rendition of the story really focuses in on the tense reality of the original event and only focuses on the negative emotions of the Disciples, in the midst of all that, we are told of the resurrection. All those emotions were real and are so important to the story as the reality of Jesus’s life, ministry, death, and now resurrection

had true impact on the people following him, and to allow Jesus to have that kind of impact on us, we have to sit in the full range of emotions of these stories and not just the happy ones. We must acknowledge the Mark telling of the story, because sometimes, the hope of Resurrection is not found with a bounty of joy and elation. Sometimes we come upon resurrection moments in the midst of hard times.

The Mark version of the resurrection story is the perfect version to remember as we all continue to face the longest and hardest year of our collective history. This has been a year of Good Friday and Holy Saturday a year of our lives being completely unended. A year of worry and fear. A year of sheltering in place like those Disciples in the Upper Room. A year of creating pods of friends to go out and do intentional activities. A year of despair. A year of being kept from mourning our loved ones like we would like. A year of wondering if and when that promised Resurrection of an end to the pandemic would come. And here we are at this point that is the focus of the Mark story. We have been told of the resurrection. The vaccine is rolling out and the light is at the end of the tunnel but we have yet to experience post-pandemic life for ourselves. We are still left in fear and wonderment as we hear of rising numbers and new strains. This is the resurrection story of Mark. The story in Mark tells us that it is okay if we are not yet okay or thrilled when we hear that resurrection is here. Things can be scary and okay at the same time. Most important, the story of Mark reminds us that no matter how the Disciples were feeling or how much they were expecting the resurrection, **it still came**. Again and Again, the sun rises. The sun rises every morning no matter if we embrace it, appreciate it, or notice it. The same is true of resurrection.

That first Holy Week, long before it was called Holy Week, God declared boldly, victory over the crucifying powers of evil and human sin. God showed us through Jesus that those powers of death do not have the last word. As Jesus was crucified, the cross became the epitome of human opposition to God's work in the world and all that God stands for as the one who gives life. And that cross was no stop to Jesus, nor God's work in the world. Kelly Brown Douglas, in her book *Stand Your Ground*, writes this of resurrection, "The resurrection asserts the sanctity of human life as it overcomes all the forces that deny it." Our God is not one of death, destruction and oppression; our God is a God of life. Holy Week is not an end to Jesus's ministry, but instead a culmination of Jesus's ministry of nurturing life. Throughout his 3ish years of ministry, Jesus restored sight to the blind, made the lame to walk, and healed chronic illness. Throughout his ministry, Jesus showed time and time again that he brings life, and refuses to hand humans over to the powers of death. Then, he was killed for his teachings and acts of nurturing life by those who were all too focused on the power of death and greed and authority. But as those government and religious leaders thought they had found Jesus's weakness by putting him on the cross and watching him die. Ironically, as they tried to take power away from Jesus by crucifying him, instead death on the cross became an opportunity for Jesus to reveal his full power as he rose from the dead and proved those that were trying to silence him, had no power over him. Jesus's ministry shows us what living out life-affirming ministry can do for individuals and communities, and in the resurrection we are promised that death-dealing powers, people and institutions will not be where the human story will end. Just as Jesus was resurrected, God brings resurrection or new life for all God's people time and time again.

The Gospel of Mark and the interaction of the women with God's messenger is the wonderful and true to life example that we may not always see God's resurrection work shining through just yet. Sometimes we are told of God's resurrection work, and we look around us, and don't see it right in front of us. Sometimes God's resurrection work in the world shakes up our expectations and plans and can make us feel uncertain or afraid. Sometimes, the news of God's resurrection may come from unexpected or even strange places. It may be hard to believe! Though we don't hear much about them in this version of the story, perhaps we are like the male Disciples staying far away from the action of resurrection work. Or perhaps like the one named male Disciple, Peter, we feel we don't deserve resurrection after our denial of God or going against God's teachings. One of the details that we get in this straightforward telling of the Resurrection, is that God's messenger specifically names Peter as one who should be told that Jesus is resurrected and that they should meet him in Galilee. Even the one who had been warned he would deny Jesus and still did it, despite being one of Jesus's most involved Disciples. Even Peter, who denied Jesus in the moments it mattered most was invited right back into Jesus's fold. That alone is a message of hope and resurrection to all of us who have had moments of doubt and turning away from God. God will continue to offer us resurrection and new life, we cannot cut ourselves off from that offer.

This glimpse into the Easter morning is a proclamation to all of us, that no matter if we don't see it, or feel uncertain about it, or we hear about it from a strange source, or we struggle to believe it, or we have even turned our back to God, God is at work bringing resurrection, bringing new life, into our world and turning it around! Though we celebrate Easter this one time of year, we experience Easter every time there is a spark of light or joy in a sea of darkness; every time something good comes from the worst; every time we find that little bit more of perseverance to keep going when times are hard; every time we smile or laugh at a good memory of someone we miss or have lost; everytime a new baby is born among us (in which case we have had plenty of Easter in our church family in the last year). Resurrection is in every glimpse of renewal, in the already and the not yet of hope and change. Resurrection is in every sunrise and in every time we wake up again in the morning until we wake up with God in paradise. Easter promises us that no matter how long the night or how dark it gets, the sun will rise, again and again. Let us hold onto that promise and celebrate it every chance we get.

We know the fear of the upper room.

We know the feeling of hard days and long nights.

We know the grief of the tomb,

And the particular ache of saying goodbye.

We know the pain of Good Friday,

And we know the darkness before dawn.

And still,



And still,  
We believe.  
We believe that again and again,  
The sun will rise.  
Again and again,  
God will draw near.  
Again and again,  
We will march toward justice.

#### SANCTIFIED ART AGAIN & AGAIN WORDS FOR WORSHIP | 25

Again and again,  
The tomb will be empty.  
Again and again,  
Love will win.  
Again and again,  
God will lead the church.  
Again and again,  
And again and again,  
We will be loved.  
The journey will not be perfect.  
We will need to rise before dawn.  
We will need angels along the way.  
But again and again,  
The sun will rise.  
We believe. Amen.

