

## 4.17.22 Easter

## Believing &amp; Sharing the Good News Mark 16.1-8

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How good are you at following instructions? If someone tells you to do something, do you do what you're told, or do you do what you want? How good are you at keeping a secret? Can people trust you with something confidential? Or does it end up on social media or in conversation? The reason I ask these questions is because in the Gospel of Mark, which is the earliest account we have of the life and ministry of Jesus, people often aren't good at following instructions. They don't listen well. They don't do what they're told to do. **In Mark, people speak when they're supposed to keep quiet; then on Easter when told to speak, they keep quiet.**

Early in Mark's Gospel Jesus is doing amazing things, he's healing people, even bringing a girl who was about 12 years old back to life. Jesus tells people repeatedly, *be silent, don't tell anyone about this*, but people don't listen, because what Jesus is doing is so amazing they can't keep quiet about it. In **Mark 7.36** after he helped someone who couldn't hear or speak to do both, ***"Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it."*** In **Mark 8.26**, he heals a blind man and tells him, *"Do not even go into the village or tell anyone in the village."* How is a guy who was blind going to hide the fact that now he can see? How do you **not tell** anyone what has happened to you?

A few verses later when Jesus asks the disciples, *"Who do people say that I am?"* Peter answered, *"You are the Messiah."* **8.30**, ***"And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him."*** Why do I share all this with you? Because there's a time to be silent and a time to speak. On Easter, it's no longer a time to be silent. It's a time to speak about **what happened with Jesus and why it matters.**

Listen to the resurrection story from **Mark 16.1-8**, "When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome (suh-loh'mee) bought spices, so that they **might go and anoint him**. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. They had been saying to one another, *"Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?"* When

they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. 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. **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.”*

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.**”

Fled, Terror. Afraid. Those sound like words from the evening news or words that describe how many people are feeling today all over the world. They're not necessarily words you associate with Easter. But they're there. Fled. Terror. Afraid. If you've been a Christian for 50 years or more, or if you're here or listening but haven't yet become a follower of Jesus, most of us know the basics of the Easter story. Jesus taught and healed people, he suffered and died on a cross, and his followers believe God raised him from the dead. In Mark's Gospel, the women who hear that news are afraid like so many people are today. **Why should this matter to you?**

Let's start at the beginning of the story. Tradition says Mark's Gospel reflects the perspective of the apostle Peter as told to John Mark. In Mark's Gospel Jesus is almost constantly active and it includes the fewest words of Jesus of the four Gospels. In Mark, the events of Easter Sunday begin with the women, buying spices, *“so that they **might go and anoint him.**”* That's why you went to a tomb when a burial had been rushed. You go to anoint a dead body. That's expected. It's not a surprise or shock. It's part of the ritual of death and dying.

While Easter is a joyful, triumphant day for us, the women who come to the tomb in Mark 16 are not feeling joy. They're grieving and in shock as some of you are today who have recently lost a loved one. We pray today for Laura Geiges and her family upon the death of her father and our prayers are with the family of long-time BBC member June Bohannon who also passed away on Good Friday. There are many grieving people in a similar place as these women. What do we know about these grieving women who came to the tomb – Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James

and Joses, and Salome? In **Mark 15:40** they're present at a distance when Jesus is dying on the cross which tells us they have courage to risk being publicly associated with Christ. **Are you willing to do that?**

In **Mark 15:41** we learn that the women followed Jesus and provided for his needs when he was in Galilee. They've not just been casual or occasional observers in the crowd. They've committed themselves to following Jesus, serving him, and providing resources to support his ministry. Again, they are an example for us; Jesus calls us to do the same.

In **Mark 15:47** we discover the women stayed long enough after Jesus died to see Joseph of Arimathea take down the body of Christ and they went to see the tomb where Joseph placed the body.

In **Mark 16:1-2** the women are portrayed as going to the tomb at the first possible moment to properly anoint Jesus' body. In all these snapshots we see the women are examples of a desperately needed virtue in our world today – **courageous compassion**. They care enough about Jesus to stick with him and to serve and support him even when it is risky and difficult.

We're living in a time when **courageous compassion** is desperately needed. People are becoming angrier, more anxious, fearful, violent, and depressed. Women and men inspired by Christ whose lives are marked by courageous compassion share the power, presence, and love of God and help hold relationships, churches, and communities together. The women we observe at the cross and at the tomb can inspire you by their example to greater **courageous compassion**.

As the women went to Jesus' tomb early in the morning on the first day of the week, the question in their minds was who would roll away the large stone blocking the entrance to the tomb so they could anoint Jesus' dead body. The women are worrying about who will roll away the stone for them, because that obstacle is too large for them to move on their own, but when they arrive God has already taken care of it. Often times in life we spend many useless and wasted hours worrying about things that never take

place or that we never have to face. God has gone before us and cleared the path, made a way, or opened a door. **Has that ever happened for you?**

When they arrive at the tomb, the women are shocked not only that the stone has been rolled away but also to discover a young man robed in white who tells them not to be alarmed (Too late! How could they not be?) and then shares the good news about Jesus of Nazareth, *“He has been raised; he is not here.”* The women are charged **to go and tell** the other disciples that Jesus will meet them in Galilee, just as he told them. The messenger is reminding the women that Jesus had told the disciples what was to happen before he was crucified. In **Mark 14.28** when Jesus and his disciples were on the Mount of Olives, Jesus had said, ***“But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.”***

It’s important to remember the importance of Jesus being ***“raised up.”*** A lot of Christians focus on the cross and Jesus’ suffering and death. There are many hymns and many contemporary Christian songs about the cross, Jesus’ blood being shed, and his death. If you ask people why Jesus came or what his purpose is, many people will say something like, *“he came to die so people could be forgiven.”* While that statement is true, it’s incomplete. It’s not a full telling of why Jesus came. Think of it this way. Say you owed a bank a million dollars. Then one day you walked into the bank and the bank manager said, *“I have good news for you. The bank has forgiven your debt. You don’t owe us a million dollars anymore.”* How would you feel? You’d probably be excited to hear that news. But, when you walk out of the bank, it hits you, *“my big debt has been wiped out, but I’m still bankrupt.”* You don’t owe a million dollars, but you don’t have anything either. That’s why we need the resurrection of Jesus. Paul says in **1 Corinthians 15,17**, ***“If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you’re still in your sins.”*** What the resurrection is like is, you owe the bank a million dollars, and you walk in, and Jesus says, *“I bought the bank and I own it. I’ve forgiven your debt; you don’t owe a million dollars anymore. Not only that, now you’re part of the bank, here’s a company credit card, you can use it for anything you need, and you never have to worry about running out of funds because I have more than enough. So,*

*you can live freely, generously, without fear, and tell other people this offer is available to them too.”*

That’s what it’s like to know not only that you’re forgiven, but that Jesus has been raised, death has been defeated, new and eternal life is possible and begins now and is offered to you and to all.

Mark 16.8 records the response of the women to their incredible experience hearing Jesus has been raised and his body being gone. *“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.**”*

Why did these courageous compassionate women flee in silence and fear? They’re afraid because they’ve been in the presence of God’s messenger, perhaps they’re afraid of being mocked as unreliable witnesses if they do what they’re told. The idea that women would be given this hugely important task was a major reversal of roles in that culture. Give the women credit. They’re the last at the cross, the first at the tomb, and they are still looking for ways to serve Jesus. They’re not portrayed as hiding in a room or going fishing to forget their troubles like some men I could name. The women had the courage to go to the tomb, but they fled in fear and didn’t initially share the story as they were told to do, although obviously eventually they did.

There’s something about Mark’s resurrection story that distinguishes it from our memories of Easter and from the other gospels. Someone is missing, and it isn’t the Easter Bunny. Jesus! In Matthew, Luke, and John, Jesus appears to the women or the other disciples to take away their fear and doubt and to give final instructions. But Mark ends almost in mid-sentence and there is no appearance of the risen Christ. A good study Bible will make plain in its notes that Mark’s gospel ended at verse 8. The verses that come after are a later addition. Mark ends like an interactive, unfinished story and you’re invited to write the next chapter because the Easter story is **an invitation**. You’re invited to become part of God’s plan by believing the good news, living in the power of the resurrection, and telling others about it. The messenger told the women, *“**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.” Will you go and tell the story of Jesus to others, or will you run away and remain silent out of fear?*

The good news for the women and for us in our fear is Jesus goes before us, just as he told us. Jesus goes ahead and if you want to see him you have to keep trusting his word and moving forward. In the command of the messenger lies the good news of forgiveness, hope, and new life. If you want to see the Risen Christ, you have to go in faith, expecting he will be faithful to meet you.

A final aspect of the Easter story is **the promise of forgiveness. Jesus doesn't give up on you when you fail.** That's why Peter is specifically mentioned. He was the leader among the disciples and the one who denied Jesus three times. Yet Jesus is looking forward to seeing him in Galilee as well, Peter will be forgiven. The good news includes your failure being forgiven. Part of the hope of Easter is a renewed purpose and a fresh start for disciples who have denied and betrayed Jesus. You can betray Jesus in many ways: when you give in to the pressures of temptations and trials, when you've spoken words or made decisions that contradict who God calls you to be; when you treat people inappropriately, when you fail to confess and address the wrongs you commit; when you've forsaken your commitments, neglected the poor, ignored the lost, or given too much of your time and resources to matters of little eternal consequence.

Each of us has to decide what we believe. You benefit from believing the good news of the Easter message that God can bring resurrection out of crucifixion, hope out of despair, joy out of sorrow, new life out of death. **For Mark, the joy of Easter comes when we believe and tell the good news of the resurrection.** Telling the story is the calling of every follower of Jesus.

You're blessed to know how the story ends for Jesus, He has been raised, and he is exalted. How will it end for you and for others God wants you to tell? **“He has been raised; he is not here,”** is the message that gives hope to all even when we're anxious and afraid. **Frederick Buechner** wrote, *“Anxiety and fear are what we know best. Wars and rumors of wars. From civilization itself to what seemed the most unalterable values of the past, everything is threatened or already in ruins. We have heard so much tragic news that when the news is good we cannot hear it. But the*

*proclamation of Easter Day is that...In the end, **Love is the victor**. Death is not the end. **The end is life**. His life and our lives through him, in him. Existence has greater depths of beauty, mystery, and benediction than the wildest visionary has ever dared to dream. **Christ our Lord has risen.**” **Believe and share the Good News!***

### **Questions for Discussion or Reflection**

1. Why do you think Mark documented two women – Mary Magdalene and Salome, whose testimonies would not have even been admissible in court – as the first ones to arrive at Jesus’ tomb? What is the significance of this?
2. What are Mary Magdalene and Salome discussing in Mark 16.3? Based on their actions, is there any indication they believe Jesus might not be in the tomb? Why or why not?
3. Jesus had predicted His own resurrection (Mark 14.28), yet the women were approaching the tomb as though Jesus’ body would be in it. Are there any promises God has made to you in which you lack confidence or faith? Are there any areas of your life that reflect unbelief in what God has said He will do?
4. What does it look like for you to love Jesus and to worship Him regardless of your unbelief, in spite of your uncertainty? What does it look like for you to continue “showing up,” even when you are disappointed that things haven’t turned out the way you hoped?
5. Describe a moment in your life when God met you in your weakness and unbelief? Were you terrified, as the women were? How did you respond?
6. What is the first command given to the women upon seeing that Jesus has risen? What does this command mean for you today?
7. “He has risen; He is not here,” is perhaps the most hope-filled, joy-filled, space and time-altering statements in the history of the universe. Why? How has the truth of the resurrection impacted you personally?