

The Resurrection: Key to Faith

Lesson for March 31, 2024

Unit I: Faith-FULL versus Faith-LESS

Adult Topic: Life Beyond Death

Background Scripture: Mark 16

Printed Text: Mark 16:1-8

Key verse: “Don’t be alarmed,” 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.” (Mark 16:6, NIV)

Seeking to know God better, John Chrysostom became a hermit in the mountains near Antioch in A.D. 373. Although his time of isolation was cut short by illness, he learned that with God at his side, he could stand alone against anyone or anything. That lesson served Chrysostom well. In A.D. 398 he was appointed patriarch of Constantinople, where his zeal for reform antagonized the Empress Eudoxia, who had him exiled. Allowed to return after a short time, Chrysostom again infuriated Eudoxia, who sent him away again. How did Chrysostom respond to such persecution? With these words: “What can I fear? Will it be death? But you know that Christ is my life, and that I shall gain by death. Will it be exile? But the earth and all its fullness are the Lord's. Poverty I do not fear; riches I do not sigh for; and from death I do not shrink.”

Today in the Word, October 1991

In this week’s lesson the women pushed through fear and grief and found hope through Christ’s resurrection.

Key Terms

1. **Afraid** (verse 8) – Designates a state of terror occasioned by some unexpected and startling occurrence. To be overwhelmingly distressed by unusual circumstances.
2. **Anoint** (verse 1) – To apply oil to as part of a religious ceremony.
3. **Amazed** (verse 8) – To be cast into a state of wonder, often blended with fear, because of the magnitude of the event experienced.

Lesson Background

Mark has unanimously been noted as the author since its earliest quotations in the second century. However, his name is not specifically mentioned in the book.

Mark was most likely written in the early AD 60s when both Peter and Mark were ministering in the city of Rome. It was written no later than Mark’s death in AD 68. Some suggest an even earlier date in the AD 40s or 50s. In any case, Mark is most likely the earliest of the four Gospels.

Notes collected and developed by Ethel Williams

The focus of the book of Mark is on Jesus as the servant of God (Mark 10:45). Chapters 1—2 bypass Christ's birth and infancy, moving directly into the ministry of John the Baptist and Christ's baptism, temptation, preaching, and miracles.

Chapter 3 continues to show Christ's miraculous powers as well as the calling of His twelve disciples. Chapters 4—8 include many of Christ's parables, further miracles, commissioning of the twelve, and other actions early in His ministry.

Chapter 9 transitions to Christ's transfiguration and a focus on His future death. Jesus preaches in Judea and Perea in chapter 10, followed by a focus on the final week of Christ's earthly ministry beginning in chapter 11. Chapter 14 offers early insight into the Lord's Supper, with Jesus' arrest, trials, and crucifixion to conclude the letter.

Leading up to chapter 16, Jesus has been unfairly tried and executed by crucifixion. Starting in this passage, Jesus' women followers find an empty tomb, but don't know what it means. Jesus' work for our salvation is done but explaining that to His disciples will take another forty days (Acts 1:3). And telling the world is a work that will continue until His return. The resurrection and events after are also covered in Matthew 28, Luke 24, John 20—21, and Acts 1:1—11. The most reliable copies of the Gospel of Mark leave the disciples where they have spent much of the story: confused and afraid. Jesus is risen, but they haven't yet accepted that.

Lesson in Depth

I. Encountering the Unexpected (Mark 16:1-5)

When the Sabbath was past: The earliest the women could go to the tomb and properly embalm the body of Jesus was on Sunday morning. Sabbath was over at the start of Saturday evening, but it wasn't light enough until Sunday morning to do the work. The time from sundown on Friday to sunrise on Sunday must have been dark, empty, desperate days for the disciples.

Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome: These women are the ones previously mentioned as witnesses of the crucifixion (Mark 15:40). Two of them were mentioned again as observing Christ's burial (Mark 15:47). As previously stated, these women may have observed the hasty actions of Joseph and Nicodemus in preparing Jesus' body for burial. Because of the approaching Sabbath the two men wanted to get Jesus buried as soon as possible.

Of the women here named, Matthew mentions only the two Mary's, and John mentions only Mary Magdalene (Matthew 28:1; John 20:1). Luke speaks of Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, and other women that were with them (Luke 24:10). Thus, we have the names of four women, the two Mary's, Salome, and Joanna, who came to the burial place of our Lord. How many "other women were present we do not know.

Regardless of the names mentioned or not mentioned, these women proved themselves to be the most devoted followers of Jesus, and they were the first to proclaim His resurrection.

Brought spices: “Spices were not used for mummification, which was not a Jewish custom, but to offset the odors from decomposition.” (Lane)

And very early in the morning the first day of the week: They came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun.” A comparison of all four Gospel accounts reveals the women came at the same time of the day, “very early in the morning the first day of the week...at the rising of the sun” (Matthew 28:1; Luke 24:1; John 20:1). “Very early in the morning, on “the first day of the week,” the sunlight of resurrection began to penetrate the darkness of our Lord’s death and burial. It was still dark as the women started out for the tomb. As they neared the place of our Lord’s burial the first rays of sunlight began to penetrate the darkness and hopelessness of the hour.

Who will roll away the stone: In all their preparation and planning the women had overlooked one very important detail. The “sepulchre” was closed off by a great “stone.” This “stone” is likely a large flat stone resembling a millstone which was placed against the entrance of the tomb and could be rolled sideways to gain access to the body (Mark 15:46). Mark is the only Gospel writer who records the women’s concern over the practical problem of not knowing who they could get to “roll us away the stone.” Apparently, the women did not know of the guard which had been placed at the tomb (Matthew 27:65-66).

The women were not expecting to find an empty tomb. They came wondering how the stone door would be opened. This shows that the resurrection accounts cannot be the product of wishful thinking. The disciples of Jesus did not expect it to happen.

Matthew 27:65-66 reminds us that there was a guard set round the tomb. All this shows that the stone could not have been rolled away by the women (they were not strong enough) or by the disciples (even if they were brave enough, they could not overcome the armed guards). We also understand that no one else wanted to roll away the stone. Matthew 28:2 tells us that it was an angel who rolled it away.

And when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away: Upon their arrival the women “looked” and “saw that the stone was rolled away.” Matthew explains how this happened: “*And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it*” (Matthew 28:2). Obviously, the stone was not rolled away in order to let the risen Christ out of the tomb, but to permit the women to see into the tomb and know Christ was no longer there. John 20:19 tells us that Jesus, in His resurrection body, could pass through material barriers. It was rolled away so that others could see into the tomb and be persuaded that Jesus Christ was risen from the dead.

For it was very great: This is a detail inserted by Mark to explain how the women could see the “rolled away” stone at a distance, even though daylight had not yet fully come. These small details will all contribute to resurrection faith.

And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man clothed in a long white robe sitting:

Realizing the stone has been rolled away, the women “enter into the sepulchre.” This is a reference to the tomb’s outer room that led to the inner burial chamber. There they “saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment.” Matthew says this “young man” was “an angel” (Matthew 28:5). Luke says there were “two men” (Luke 24:4). This is no contradiction. Mark apparently makes reference only to the angel who served as spokesman. He is called “a young man” because his outward appearance was that of a man. The “long white garment” worn by the angels attracted the women’s attention. Luke says their raiment was “shining garments” (Luke 24:4). Matthew says their clothing was “white as snow” (Matthew 28:3). There is no question Mark and the other Gospel writers believe these angels are messengers sent from heaven with a divine message.

The text suggests the women did not leave in praise or excitement; they leave “affrighted” in trembling and astonishment. “*Affrighted*” means “afraid, trembling.” They are too afraid to talk to anybody because what the angel is telling them is too good to be true. Mary Magdalene in John 20 goes to the disciples and says, “Somebody stole His body!” She cannot imagine there has been a resurrection.

II. An Unexpected Assignment (Mark 16:6-8)

And he saith unto them, Be not affrighted: The angel’s message itself seems too good to be true. Remember, the message the angel is delivering is the Father’s message, not the angel’s. Speaking for God the Father, the angel says, “Be not affrighted.”

Who was crucified. He is risen! The angel painted the contrast between *what Jesus was and what He is*. He *was* crucified, beyond all doubt – that means He *was* dead. Now, He *is* risen – not only resuscitated, but resurrected.

He is risen! The *fact* of Jesus’ resurrection is a matter of history. What it *means* can only be understood by what the Bible tells us. Therefore, it is important to consider what the empty tomb of Jesus and His resurrection means.

The resurrection means that Jesus was *declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead* (Romans 1:4).

The resurrection means that we have assurance of our own resurrection: *For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus* (1 Thessalonians 4:14).

The resurrection means that God has an eternal plan for these bodies of ours. “There was nothing in the teaching of Jesus approaching the Gnostic heresy that declared that the flesh is inherently evil. Plato could only get rid of sin by getting rid of the body. Jesus retains the body; and declares that God feeds the body as well as the soul, that the body is as sacred thing as the soul, since the soul makes it its sanctuary.” (Morgan)

The resurrection means that Jesus has a continuing ministry: *He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He ever lives to make intercession for them* (Hebrews 7:25).

The resurrection means that Christianity and its God are unique and completely different and unique among world religions.

The resurrection proves that though it looked like Jesus died on the cross like a common criminal He actually died as a sinless man, out of love and self-sacrifice to bear the guilt of our sin. The death of Jesus on the cross was the payment, but the resurrection was the receipt, showing that the payment was perfect in the sight of God the Father.

See the place where they laid Him: The actual event of Jesus' resurrection is nowhere described, but the discovery of it is recorded in some detail. Here, the women who intended to give Jesus' body a more proper preparation for burial discovered that the stone was rolled away from the tomb and that the body of Jesus was not inside the tomb.

Those women were later grateful that the angel told them to see the place where they laid Him. It would have – it should have – been enough to merely hear the testimony of the angel. Nevertheless, when they saw it, it gave them ground to stand on even more solid than the testimony of an angel. “One eyewitness is better than twenty ear-witnesses; men will believe what you have seen if they do not believe what you have heard.” (Spurgeon)

- When we see the place where they laid Him is now empty, we see that the Father did not forsake Jesus.
- When we see the place where they laid Him is now empty, we see that death is conquered.
- When we see the place where they laid Him is now empty, we see that we have a living friend in Jesus. (Guzik)

Go your way: literally means “depart” or “be gone.” It seems to denote urgency, suggesting the women should lose no time discharging their duty. They are to go tell Peter he will see Jesus in “Galilee.” The reference is apparently to the promise which Christ made on His way from the upper room in Jerusalem to the garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:28).

Think of the last time those disciples saw Jesus. Think of their response to the circumstances that were taking place around them in the Garden of Gethsemane as Jesus is betrayed and arrested. God the Father sent a message too good to be true. Jesus is going ahead to “Galilee”, and He will be there waiting for them! Evidently our Lord has already forgiven Peter before Peter has asked for forgiveness. Resurrection faith like all faith begins from God's side (Ephesians 2:8).

Tell his disciples: Through the angel, the women received a message from Jesus they had to deliver. We might think of this message as an *invitation*, because through this message the disciples were invited to meet with Jesus.

This shows that *the invitations of Jesus are filled with grace*. The disciples had completely failed Jesus. He had every right to be done with them, but in grace He extended this kind invitation to them.

This shows us that *the invitations of Jesus are always fulfilled on His part*. He said that He would meet them in Galilee and indeed He did (John 21:1 is one example).

This shows us that *when Jesus invites us, He wants to reveal Himself to us*. “*He is going before you into Galilee, there you shall see Him*” was the message. The main object was to see Him, for Jesus to reveal Himself to His people.

This shows us that *when Jesus invites us He always remembers His promises*. “*As He said to you,*” the angel added to the invitation. What Jesus says, He will do, and He can never fail in any promise.

Tell His disciples and Peter: We are amazed that Jesus wanted to meet with these men who failed Him so deeply, yet He made special notice of Peter. Some say He distinguished Peter because he was separate from the rest of the disciples in the sense that he was no longer among them. This was probably not the case. Instead, Jesus distinguished Peter because He had special hope, special forgiveness, special restoration for the one who denied Him the worst.

“If any of you have behaved worse to your Master than others, you are peculiarly called to come to him now. You have grieved him, and you have been grieving because you have grieved him. You have been brought to repentance after having slidden away from him, and now he seals your pardon by inviting you to himself.” (Spurgeon)

And they went out quickly, and fled from the sepulchre: The women found an empty tomb and received a personal message from an angel sent from God. How did they respond? Mark says, “they went out quickly, and fled from the sepulchre.” The word “*fled*” means “*they ran away, they vanished*.” It is the same word used in Matthew 26:56 when the disciples “*fled*” in the Garden of Gethsemane. These women “*fled*” from the tomb in the same manner the disciples “*fled*” when Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane.

For they trembled and were amazed: “These women left the tomb, and fled. Seized with trembling, and astonishment; – the actual Greek word there is ‘ecstasy,’ – seized with trembling and ecstasy, filled with fear; so they fled.” (Morgan)

And they said nothing to anyone: This does not mean that they made no report of the resurrection because we plainly know that they did (Mark 16:11 and Luke 24:9). It means that as they left the scene of the empty tomb, they did not discuss it among themselves. They didn’t try to figure it out or match their stories. They simply went to make a report to the disciples as the angel invited them to do.

Lesson Summary

The women who went to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body with spices experienced a profound transformation of faith. Here are some lessons that can be gleaned from their experience:

1. **Persistence in the face of obstacles:** Despite the challenges of the early morning hour and the heavy stone sealing the tomb, the women persisted in their intention to honor Jesus by anointing his body.
2. **Courage to confront the unknown:** The women showed courage in approaching the tomb, not knowing how they would move the stone or what they would find inside.
3. **Trust in divine providence:** When the women discovered the tomb empty and encountered the angel, they were initially afraid but were reassured by the angel's message that Jesus had risen, demonstrating their trust in God's plan.
4. **Witnessing and sharing the Good News:** The women were entrusted with the message of Jesus' resurrection and were instructed to share this news with the disciples, illustrating the importance of sharing one's faith with others.
5. **Transformation of grief into joy:** Their initial purpose was to mourn Jesus' death, but they left the tomb with a newfound joy and hope, realizing that Jesus had conquered death.

Overall, the faith of the women in this passage teaches us about the transformative power of encountering the risen Christ and the importance of steadfastness, courage, trust, witness, and joy in our own faith journeys.