

Scripture Reading: Mark 16

“Now when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, that they might come & anoint Him. 2 Very early in the morning, on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen. 3 And they said among themselves, "Who will roll away the stone from the door of the tomb for us?" 4 But when they looked up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away--for it was very large. 5 And entering the tomb, they saw a young man clothed in a long white robe sitting on the right side; & they were alarmed. 6 But he said to them, "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. 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." 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. 9 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. 10 She went and told those who had been with Him, as they mourned and wept. 11 And when they heard that He was alive and had been seen by her, they did not believe. 12 After that, He appeared in another form to two of them as they walked and went into the country. 13 And they went and told it to the rest, but they did not believe them either. 14 Later He appeared to the eleven as they sat at the table; and He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who had seen Him after He had risen. 15 And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. 16 He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.

Jesus Saves His People from Their Sins

Today we celebrate Resurrection Sunday: A Sunday where God's people celebrate our Lord's conquest of sin and death! This service should be a great time of encouragement for the people of God who know that their sins have been forgiven:

- **Those who know the Savior Jesus, who came to save His people from their sins!**

This is the Gospel we have been focusing on as we have studied the person of Jesus in our short series of sermons from the Gospel According to Mark. Mark gives his account of the resurrection as do Matthew, Luke and John. We have four accounts to verify this important event as well as the summary of witnesses given by the Apostle Paul in the 15th chapter of First Corinthians.

The resurrection of Jesus on the third day is central to all that we believe and as Paul goes on to say to the Corinthians: "if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! 18 Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. 19 If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable."

- **So we have a lot riding on the question of whether the resurrection of Jesus is an historical event!**

This is why it is attacked so viciously by those who reject God: *[mention the Barker challenge]*

I could spend our time reviewing the historical accuracy of the Gospel accounts and I could also spend hours discussing all of the theological implications of this great truth.

- **However, we have been doing to short series on the Gospel According to Mark so that we grow to know Jesus better and to encourage our further study of His life and ministry.**

Toward this end I want to take a few minutes this morning to review the impact that the Resurrection of Jesus had on those individuals who are mentioned in these Gospel accounts.

I will work through them in reverse order starting with the more than five-hundred who saw the resurrected Jesus according to Paul.

Some or all of them would have been present when Jesus gave the Great Commission recorded in full by Matthew: There we read that they worshiped Jesus, but that some doubted. The world accuses us of having blind faith, but the reality is that our faith is based on true historical facts and that our faith grows as we come to a fuller understanding of these events just as we see in these early disciples.

- **Their doubts were honest doubts and not skepticism or outright rejection of the truth.**

Knowing the resurrected Jesus is at the heart of the Christian walk and the better we get to know Him the fewer doubts we have... If you have doubts, don't pull away from the Savior, but rather dig into these Gospel accounts and get to know Him better and better.

- **Sometimes this confidence also comes in very practical ways like attending church or sharing a meal with those who believe.**

We see this with another group encounter which took place a few weeks after the resurrection of Jesus: A few of the disciples had returned to their vocation of fishing and Jesus joins them in the morning for breakfast at the seashore. Again we see Jesus being very patient with them as we saw last week:

- **As Jesus dines with them on that seashore He teaches them what it means to truly love and serve Him.**

Then there is Thomas: It is John alone who tells us that the Disciple Thomas was not present when Jesus first appeared to the eleven which we read responsively this morning. Thomas demands that he be able to touch Jesus and in the end confesses Jesus as his Lord and God.

- **In that account we see the patience of Jesus AND we see how the Savior uses even our human failings to draw others to Himself!**

How often down thru the centuries have others been called to faith in Jesus through the testimony of doubting Thomas who encountered the risen Jesus! Of course this brings us to the appearance of Jesus to His disciples and followers on the evening of His Resurrection. There had been great confusion that day with the women and disciples coming and going with stories of a missing body or a risen Savior:

- **Jesus appears in their midst to put away all doubt while rebuking them for their lack of faith.**
- **They should have believed the faithful witnesses who told them He was alive, just as we are called upon to believe the faithful accounts passed down to us today.**

Earlier in the afternoon on that first Easter Jesus met with two disciples who had decided to journey to Emmaus. They had followed Jesus and were now dejected and defeated because the one they had thought was the hope of Israel had been crucified and buried in Jerusalem.

It is Luke who tells us how Jesus met them on the road, giving us the longest account of any of the appearances of Jesus after His resurrection. Jesus asked them why they are so sad and they ask if He was the ONLY person who did not know of the events that just took place! They explain how they had put their hope in Jesus, but that He was crucified: EVEN though they had heard from the women that He was alive, they did not believe... Luke tells us that Jesus then said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?" 27 And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself."

Here is one of those places where your pastor becomes just a bit frustrated, but also absolutely convinced that the Bible is NOT a made-man work as the skeptics would like us to believe!

Here on this road to Emmaus Jesus gives what is perhaps the greatest sermon of all time...

- **Expounding for them all of the Old Testament Scriptures that speak of Him!**

A precious treasury for all of the pastors who have served in the Church down through the centuries...

- **And Luke does not give us a single word of this discourse!**

Of course it is all there for us to find in the Book of Acts, the various epistles, & our own study of the Old Testament...

- **But I think it is good to point out that IF the Bible was produced by men, they would certainly have included this sermon as the greatest of summaries!**

What Luke does share is how these men came to faith saying, "'Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?'" 33 So they rose up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, 34 saying, "The Lord is risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!"

Yes, that brings us to the encounter of the risen Savior with Simon Peter. Again, if WE were writing the story, this would be a central part of what happened on Easter: Jesus had told Peter that Satan wanted to sift him and that he would deny him three times during His trials.

Peter denied His Lord with cursing and as the cock crowed Jesus looked over at him...

- **Peter went away & wept bitterly!**

There is no record of Peter at the crucifixion and we can only imagine how depressed and dejected he had become by Sunday morning. He and John ran early to the tomb after Mary came with news that the body of Jesus was gone:

- **John sees the empty tomb and grave cloths and believes, but we are only told that Peter went away to his home.**

At some point during the day, Jesus appeared to Peter: What a glorious and intriguing encounter this must have been, but again we are not given a single word of what was said, nor even told where they met. What we do know is that the Peter who had to be rebuked by Jesus for Satanic thinking and denied His Lord before even servant girls out of fear would in just a few short weeks stand before the crowds at Pentecost proclaiming to them:

- **"let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."**

And this brings us back to early on that first Easter morning and the women who Mark tells us came to the tomb to serve Jesus:

- **Still not understanding all that was happening, but willing to serve Jesus, even if it was only to care for His body.**

I must make the point here that anyone who thinks the Bible is anti-women has probably never seriously read the Scriptures!

- **Not only is it the women who desire to continue serving, it is these women to whom Jesus first appears.**

We know from John's account that Mary Magdalene runs off quickly to tell the others that the tomb is empty and the other women are told by the angel that Jesus has risen and that they are to go and tell the disciples the Good News!

They go off fearful, excited and confused all at once and Matthew & Luke both tell us that Jesus appeared to them personally on their way back to the disciples telling them to rejoice and again to go back and tell the others they have seen the risen Jesus!

- But it is Mark in our morning text who tells us that Jesus **FIRST** appeared to Mary Magdalene, a forgiven sinner out of whom He had cast seven demons!

Mary had run quickly to tell the disciples that the stone had been rolled back at the tomb and she returns after Peter and John have gone on their way.

- Then we have one of the most beautiful encounters recorded in the Scriptures and it is the Apostle John who gives us most of the details of this first appearance of the risen Jesus to one of His faithful Saints.

Here we see so many of the powerful images of the Bible coming to a climax: The fall of man took place in a garden where the first Adam failed to protect His bride and plunged all of mankind into sin & death by his disobedience. Now we see the second Adam, Jesus, who has been completely faithful having done the will of His father, making His first post-resurrection appearance in a garden to a women! The resurrection account given by John is rich with symbols that God's people should be familiar with from the Song of Solomon! We know from John chapter 19 that Joseph and Nicodemus took the body of Jesus from the cross, wrapped Him in linens with over one hundred pounds of spices and buried Him in a tomb that was in a garden!

Listen anew to what we find in the Song of Solomon chapter 6: "Where has your beloved gone, O most beautiful among women? Where has your beloved turned, that we may seek him with you? 2 My beloved has gone down to his garden to the beds of spices, to graze in the garden sand to gather lilies."

John continues in his account:

11 "But Mary stood outside by the tomb weeping, & as she wept she stooped down & looked into the tomb."

A picture of someone who has lost her love – Again it is a vivid reminder of the love story in Song of Solomon! Song of Solomon 3:1 "On my bed by night I sought him whom my soul loves; I sought him, but found him not. 2 I will rise now and go about the city, in the streets and in the squares; I will seek him whom my soul loves. I sought him, but found him not. 3 The watchmen found me as they went about in the city. Have you seen him whom my soul loves?"

- Yes, in John's account we now come to some Angelic Watchman!

John 20:11 "...as she wept [Mary] stooped down and looked into the tomb. 12 And she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. 13 Then they said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" I don't have time to fully explore all the images that should come to mind with these angels, but remember that we see them in two very prominent places in the Old Testament:

- Guarding the garden entrance
- Guarding the mercy seat

However, Mary was NOT yet seeing with the eyes of faith! John 20:13 "She said to [the angels], "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him."

- Mary is sadly focused on the past... On the Lord she had loved and served: Seeking to love and serve Him still by tending to the body!

14 "Now when she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus. 15 Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?"

Jesus asks WHOM not what are you seeking! He was pointing her to her living Lord and not some service or the past: She is clinging to the old creation and Jesus is about to make her a new creation!

We should take special note that the Christian walk is ALWAYS about WHO we are seeking and not what we are seeking or doing! John 20:15 "She, supposing Him to be the gardener..."

- The Spirit reminds us again that she is in a garden setting!
- Man was lost in the garden where the woman was deceived and now man is restored in a garden where a woman meets her Risen Lord!

“She, supposing Him to be the gardener, said to Him, "Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away." Mary continues to see things only through her eyes, but Jesus is about to give her NEW EYES to see! John 20:16 “Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to Him, "Rabboni!" (which is to say, Teacher). Two simple words exchanged!

- Mary’s eyes are opened and she sees her Lord, affectionately calling Him teacher, as she likely always had, but Jesus is going to show her a better way:

The child who was born in Bethlehem has now become the Risen Savior that Isaiah said would be called, Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. This was true for Mary and it is true for all who have faith in Jesus – All those in His church... His Bride!

I would be remiss if I did not also mention that Matthew in his account teaches us that even eye-witnesses can have hardened hearts. He tells us of the soldiers who were tasked with guarding the tomb of Jesus who may have been the only actual eye-witnesses of the resurrection. Matthew tells us that as the women journeyed to the tomb, “Behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat on it. ³ His countenance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. ⁴ And the guards shook for fear of him, and became like dead men.”

Seeing this historic event and all that fear did not lead to saving faith! Matthew goes on to tell us that some of the soldiers went to the religious leaders telling them all that happened and that did not bring them to faith either...

- They offered the soldiers bribes to lie about what had happened which they happily accepted.

If we contemplate which of the persons discussed in these account might fit where we are at, I hope and pray it is not these soldiers or religious leaders.

- As we do reflect on the glory and wonder of that first Easter morning, we must remember two important lessons:

First, it is clearly a reminder that we must be patient in bearing with one another: We should see the actions, doubts and betrayals of Mary, John and Peter as examples of why we must show patience and trust that the Holy Spirit will do His work in the our lives & those of our fellow Saints.

And finally, we must learn the importance of hearing the voice of Jesus: We see Faith manifested in Mary, then Peter, the two on the road to Emmaus and finally with all the Disciples, including Thomas when they truly HEARD the voice of Jesus and their eyes are opened! Jesus said to Thomas, "because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." We cannot touch the body of Jesus the way that Thomas did that evening, but we can hear the voice of Jesus quietly calling our name as He did Mary: His sheep hear His voice!

- May God the Holy Spirit grant us ears to hear the voice of our Savior now and forevermore!

Communion meditation: *Food in the Song...*

Song of Solomon 2:3,4 & 5:1

“As an apple tree among the trees of the forest, so is my beloved among the young men. With great delight I sat in his shadow, and his fruit was sweet to my taste. ⁴ He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love. ^{5:1} I am come into my garden, my sister, [my] bride: I have gathered my myrrh with my spice; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk. Eat, O friends; Drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved.”