The Resurrection of Jesus

Text: Mark 16:1-8

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**Scriptures:** Mark 16:1-20 [Parallel passages: Matthew 28:1-10; Luke 24:1-12; John 20:1-18]

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] 309; 326; 306; Facing a task unfinished, 16b, 23, 302

**Series:** Mark (#52), Occasional (Easter Morning)

**Theme:**  As they were going to anoint the dead body of Jesus, a group of women find the tomb open with a messenger inside who tells them that Jesus has risen and is going to Galilee which results in them fleeing the tomb in astonishment, fear and silence.

**Proposition:**  Jesus has risen from the dead, go and tell others this astonishing truth!

**Introduction**

Silence can be a blessing in a noisy world. I love the tranquillity, peace and quiet of the mountains. Sometimes silence can be the wisest response – for example when you don’t know what to say to someone who is grieving. Just quietly being with a friend who has suffered great loss is often more than sufficient. Job’s friends were most helpful when “*they sat with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and* ***no one spoke a word*** *to him, for they saw that his suffering was very great*” (Job 2:13). Yet sometimes remaining silent is the wrong thing to do. For example “*If your brother sins against you, go and* ***tell him*** *his fault*” (Matt 18:15). Or, if we **do not speak** the gospel to the world around us (Matt 28:19-20).

Think of the silence of Jesus before Pontius Pilate (Mark 15:5). “*He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent*” (Isaiah 53:7). The gospels do not record any words from Jesus as he was scourged, struck and spat on by the Roman soldiers. Not many words came from His mouth on the cross, except a few including: “*Father forgive them for they know not what they do*” (Luke 23:34). “*Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise*” (Luke 23:43). “*Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?*” which means “*My God, my God why have you forsaken me?*” (Mark 15:34). “*I thirst*” (John 19:28). “*Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit*” (Matthew 27:50).

Then there was silence from Jesus. He spoke no more. The Word who was with God in the beginning and through Whom all things were made (ref. John 1:1-3) died. The Living Word spoke no more at the cross. It was a deadly quiet Sabbath the next day inside the sealed tomb where the body of Jesus lay wrapped in a linen shroud. Now as we come to the final chapter of Mark’s gospel, we hear the conversation between the women who went to the tomb early on the Sunday morning. We hear the words of a messenger from inside the tomb and we also learn about the initial silence of the women as they fled in fear.

We’ll consider these events under three points this morning:

1. The open tomb
2. The angelic messenger
3. The frightened women
4. **The open tomb**

All four gospels describe the tomb where the body of Jesus had been laid as a group of women went there early on the Sunday morning after the Friday when Jesus died. Characteristically, Mark’s description is the shortest. He mentions three women, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome going the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus. These women, along with others, had come to Jerusalem from Galilee with Jesus (Mark 15:41). They knew that Jesus had died because: they were there when the nails were driven into his hands and feet, they were there when the cross was erected, and the horizontal beam attached to the vertical structure, they there when the spear pierced his side, there when he cried out and breathed his last breath (15:40).

The two Marys knew where the tomb was because they saw Joseph of Arimathea lay the wrapped body of Jesus in this grave and seal the burial cavity which was hewn out of rock with a ‘very large’ stone (15:47). This would have been rolled down a sloping groove and slid into place, to secure the tomb from grave robbers. As they approached the gravesite, the women were saying to one another “*who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?*” (16:3). They expected to find the tomb as they had left it late on Friday evening – securely closed. Instead, they ‘*saw that the stone had been rolled back*’ (16:4).

In his account Matthew revealed that ‘*an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it*’ (Matt 28:4). This angelic being, Matthew writes, looked ‘*like lightning*’ and the guards who had been posted to keep watch over the tomb ‘*trembled and became like dead men*’ (Matt 28:4). These guards had been sent by Pontius Pilate at the request of the chief priests and Pharisees who asked Him to “*order the tomb to be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples go and steal him away and tell the people ‘He has risen from the dead’*” (Matt 27:64). Nobody had stolen the body of Jesus, but His human flesh and bones were no longer in the tomb, as the group of women learned from a young man who was now inside the open tomb – which brings us to our second point:

1. **The angelic messenger**

The young man was ‘*an angel of the Lord*’ as Matthew’s account reveals. Mark writes that he was wearing a white robe in the tomb. White is not so much a colour description so much as an indicator of the dazzling character of the glory of the being. Angels are ministering spirits who bring important messages directly from God e.g. Gabriel gives Daniel understanding about a vision (Dan 8:16); Mary was given information about two births direct from God via the angel Gabriel (Luke 1:26-37). Angels are a bit like spiritual courier drivers who rush urgent verbal packages to those who need them. Angels bring divine revelation, delivering information which could not be fully known otherwise.

The white robed messenger was at the tomb that Sunday morning to answer the unspoken question: “*Where is the body of Jesus?*” The women’s surprise and distress early that morning must have been written all over their startled faces because the angel broke his silence said “*Do not be alarmed.* *You seek Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen; He is not here; See the place where they laid Him*” (Mark 16:6). The angel simply gives the reason why the body of Jesus was not in the tomb. It is one word in Greek, three in English “*He has risen*”. Well before the time when He approached Jerusalem to be killed, Jesus had said repeatedly that His body would be in the grave for three days (Mark 8:31, 9:31, 10:34). The Jewish Sabbath was measured from sunset on Friday to sunset on Saturday. The body of Jesus had been laid in the tomb on Friday (the day of preparation) before sundown. His body had remained in the grave during the Sabbath.

Now it was Sunday, the third day. He had come alive again before the women arrived. He had left the grave behind. The angel said, “*see the place where they laid him*” (16:6). This would have been a bench or ledge hewn in the rock. John’s account tells us that there were objects lying there (20:7). Linen clothes lying in one place, and the face cloth which had been on Jesus’ head, folded up separately by itself. Burial practice was to bind the body tightly in a linen shroud leaving upper part of shoulders and neck exposed and then to wrap a separate cloth around the head: a bit like a turban. These grave clothes were undisturbed – left behind like the empty chrysalis of a caterpillar’s cocoon when the butterfly has flown away.

A close friend of Jesus had walked out of his grave after being dead four days when Christ had cried out with a loud voice “*Lazarus come out*” (John 11:43). Lazarus was brought back to life, revived to live again in flesh and blood for a time before the grave claimed him back. But the resurrection of Christ was different from that of his friend Lazarus.

The resurrection of Jesus was not the temporary resuscitation of a dead body, but the complete transformation of Christ to be a man with a different kind of body – an eternal one. Still human, still flesh and blood, but glorified, forever changed. A physical body able to appear, and to disappear, able to move unseen from place to place (Luke 24:31,36) passing through locked doors (John 20:26). Not a ghostly body, but a material one: composed of flesh and bones. A body which Jesus would invite His disciples to touch and see. A body which bore the marks of the nails on his hands and feet. A body into whose wounded side Thomas would place his finger. A body which would again consume food in the presence of the disciples.

Inside that tomb, the angel spoke these last words to the women: “*But go, tell His disciples and Peter that he is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, just as He told you.*” (16:7) The angel of the Lord commanded the women not to remain silent about the open tomb, emptied of the body of Jesus, but at first they were so frightened by what they had seen and heard that they ‘*said nothing to anyone*’ (16:8) ... which brings us to our third point.

1. **The frightened women**

We are familiar with Easter Sunday when we especially remember the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Each week, on the Lord’s Day we gather to worship the Lord together. We do so on a Sunday because that is the day of the week when Jesus left the tomb having risen from the dead (ref. Acts 20:7). We know that the resurrection is central to the gospel and therefore to the Christian faith. Remember, the Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinth believers: “*If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins*” (1 Cor 15:17).

The women who met the dazzling angel in the tomb that first Easter Sunday morning were not familiar with the resurrection of Jesus as we are. It was a huge shock to them, as Mark records at the end of our text: “*They went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had gripped them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid*” (Mark 16:8). The response of the women was a mixture of strong emotions. They trembled at what they had seen (and not seen!). They were amazed (our English word “ecstasy” comes from the Greek word here). They were afraid. The underlying Greek word can mean to be in fear of something or somebody and also it can mean to worship/ God with an attitude of reverent awe.

Why were they so afraid, so terrified? This was a ‘normal response’ to the naturally abnormal. Those who are confronted with God’s direct intervention react with overwhelming fear. The absence of Christ’s body and the presence of the angel were events were beyond the realm of any other human experience. If you or I had been that first Resurrection Sunday morning, would we have trembled, and been astonished and afraid? Likely so. At first the women said nothing to anyone, but then the fear of these women turned to courage, and they passed the message about the risen Jesus on to others. We know this from Matthew’s account, as he records in his gospel: “*So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples*” (28:8).

The last phrases we have in our text from Mark 16:1-8 is ‘*they said nothing to anyone for they were afraid*’. It is a strange way to finish the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God – with the disobedience of the women to the angel’s command to speak. Yet this is how some of the early Greek manuscripts end. Others have the additional verses 9-20 that we heard earlier. A few others also have further additions to verse 14. Biblical scholars differ as to whether verses 9-20, often referred to as the “longer ending of Mark’s gospel”, are the inspired Word of God. These verses seem to draw content from the other gospels in order to provide a less abrupt, and therefore less surprising, end to the gospel of Mark.

Certainly there is much in the ‘longer ending’ that we know to be true from other Scriptures, for example:

* That at first, the disciples did not believe that Jesus had risen from the dead (v11&14 – ref. Luke 24:11).
* That the risen Jesus appeared to two disciples ‘*as they were walking into the country*’ (v12 – ref. Luke 24:13-35).
* That the risen Jesus gave the command to ‘*Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation*’ (v15 – ref. Matt 28:19-20).
* That faith in the Risen Saviour Jesus Christ is essential for salvation (v16 – ref. John 3:36, also Acts 2:38)
* That signs (v17-18) did accompany the apostles as the New Testament church was established in the first century AD: Casting out of demons in Christ’s name (e.g. Acts 5:16, 8:7. 16:18), speaking in new tongues, not previously learned (e.g. Acts 2:4), Laying hands on the sick with the result that they were healed (e.g. Acts 5:16).
* That Jesus did ascend to heaven and sat down at the right hand of God (v19 – Luke 24.51; Acts 1:9; Luke 22:69; Acts 2:33).
* That the disciples did go out and ‘*preach everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by accompanying signs*’ (ref. Book of Acts).

So there is much in the ‘longer ending of Mark’ that we know to be true from other Scriptures. However, there are two likely exceptions; signs mentioned in verse 18a: “*they will pick up serpents with their hands; and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them*”. Some people suggest that we do find evidence for snake handling elsewhere in Scripture. They point o Luke 10:19 where Jesus gives authority to His disciples to ‘tread on serpents’. This is not exactly the same as deliberately picking up snakes. They also reference Acts 28:3 where a viper latches onto Paul’s hand when he picks up a bundle of firewood and he shakes the snake off without any harm coming to him. However, this occasion is not presented in Scripture as a pattern to be safely followed by others.

Drinking deadly poison is nowhere commended in Scripture, in fact Jesus warns Satan about Him taking unnecessary risks that endanger life, quoting “*You shall not put the Lord your God to the test*” (Matt 4:7 ref. Deut 6:16, see also Matt 10:23; 24:16-18). You may know that there have been a number of deaths amongst groups who have taken Mark 16:18 literally by handling venomous snakes and/or drinking poisons.

In light of the above, I believe that it is wisest to view the longer ending of Mark not as the inspired Word of God, but as containing many truths which can be verified with reference to Scriptures elsewhere. But also, as we have just seen, some details which appear to be unscriptural. So where does all this leave us today?

* With the gospel of Mark. A gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God’ (1:1).
* With eye witness accounts of the life, death, burial and resurrection of Jesus.
* With the need to respond to what we have heard.

Either you believe that Jesus is who He says He is: God’s Son. Believe that he lived, suffered, died and was brought back to life three days later never to die again. Believe that he died to take your place. Believe that God’s right judgement against your rebellion fell on him. Believe that because he has loved you so much as to die for you, you must love him in return, you can do nothing else! OR

You reject these truths and thereby reject Christ as your Saviour. Remember what Jesus said, “*Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him.” (John 3:36).*

You see friends, Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive (1 Cor 15:20-22). This is how the resurrection affects you. There is life beyond the grave! Either life lived in the presence of Jesus, a life of peace and joy (think of the best moment of your life…like that amplified all the time!). Or life lived away from all that is good, a life of turmoil and sadness, grief and loss (think of the worst moment of your life…like that amplified all the time!)

Those who do not have this Risen Christ as their Lord and Savior will meet Him as their Judge and they will be found guilty! For all who believe on the Resurrected Lord of Glory today. May the Lord strengthen our belief as we are reminded from the Scripture that our faith is founded upon the historical, literal, verified, certain resurrection of the dead crucified Christ to be alive again forever.

Do not be like the women were at first, when disobeyed the Lord’s command through His angelic messenger and ‘*they said nothing to anyone*’ (16:8). There’s was not a godly silence.

Silence has its’ place in our lives, but not when it comes to the proclaiming the gospel wherever we are in the world. Today we have heard the gospel again so that we may be equipped to speak this gloriously good news to others.

AMEN.