

16 When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. ² Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb ³ and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"

⁴ But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. 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 "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. ⁷ But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'"

⁸ Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.^[a]

The Word of the Lord.

Friends in Christ,

There are four gospel accounts of the resurrection of Jesus. And this one is the shortest but also shocking. The shocking part of Mark's report is that the women at the tomb were silent in reaction to the news of Jesus' resurrection. Did you catch that?

Mk 16:8 Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

We know from the other gospels that the women did go on later to tell others what they had seen. But that's not Mark's concern in our Bible reading this morning. He concludes his report here on the resurrection saying that initially the women said nothing to anyone because they were afraid.

But let's back up a bit.

The Resurrection

First, Mark tells the story of the resurrection. The women were on their way to the tomb where Jesus had been buried. His body had been put in the tomb as quickly as possible on Friday evening because the Sabbath and the Passover were about to begin. There was no time to properly prepare his dead body for the grave. Moreover, it was against religious laws to do that on the Sabbath so they waited until the morning after

the Sabbath, which would have been Sunday. They came expecting to find the dead body of the one they loved and to anoint it with burial spices.

The only concern they voiced on the ways was what we read in v.3:
Mk 16:3 they (the women) asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"

That quickly became no concern however. Something amazing had happened. They found the stone rolled back, so they went inside. And there an angel spoke to them. Again, Mark tells us,

Mk 16:5 As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe (angels often appeared as people dressed in white) sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed. Mk 16:6 "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.

What? How can it be? Or can it be? These women are frightened by what they see. Or are they dumbstruck by what they hear?

The Reaction of the Women

What are we to make of the reaction of the women?

Well, to contrast, let's look at various reactions to Jesus that people have had as recorded by Mark. To name a few:

There was a man in Mark 1 from whom Jesus cast out a demon. He said to Jesus, "**You are the Holy One of God!**" (v.24)

The disciple Peter said to Jesus in Mark 8, "**You are the Messiah.**" (v.29)

Blind Bartimaeus in chapter 10 called Jesus, "**the Son of David.**" (v.47/48)

And then Roman Centurion who watched Jesus die on Good Friday declared in chapter 15, "**Surely this man was the Son of God!**" (v.39)

Do you see how Mark works to get us as readers to respond to Jesus. That's why he leaves us with this shocking response of the women to Jesus' resurrection. Everyone else has had something to say, but now suddenly all we read after Jesus rises from the dead is,

Mk 16:8 Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

Mark wants us to react to their silence. How can that be? Would I be silent like those women? What would you do or say?

Sometimes I've not said anything about Jesus because I was afraid. How about you? When I was young, some bully might say, Do you go to church? Or do you go to a Christian school? And I'd say no or change the topic because I thought he might make fun of me. I think as Christians—especially living in our pluralistic and post-modern culture—we don't say what we believe because we're afraid of offending others or of

sounding too confident. Or maybe we secretly wonder if this “Jesus-rising-from-the-dead” stuff really is true.

Well, like one of my favourite authors says,

I've got some good news for you. Christianity is true. It's factually, actually, really true. Go ahead. Check it out. Truth never fears investigation.

My friends, no matter what people tell you, God isn't dead. He still speaks in the evidence he has so graciously given us.

And based on good evidence there is reason for us to speak about the truth of the resurrection as well.

Believing in the resurrection of Jesus is reasonable. Let me give you five good reasons I've found to believe that Jesus really did rise from the dead and is alive. (paraphrased from Steve Brown's booklet, *Easter Meditations*)

First of all, the disciples said it's true. Some people say that they were just making it up in order to save face after following a guy that ended up dead on a cross. Does that make sense? Think about it. The disciples all deserted Jesus and ran away scared. What drove them to come out of their hiding places and to talk? Well, they really saw Jesus alive; they knew it was true! Nothing else can explain the sudden change and courage they had to tell the truth, except the truth of Jesus' resurrection and his power at work in them.

Secondly, the disciples were faithful in testifying about it in their actions. If Jesus hadn't risen from the dead, do you think they'd risk their lives to back up something that didn't happen? They'd have licked their wounds and gone back to the fishing boats and tax collecting life they had before they began following Jesus. But they didn't! The disciples told the story of the Jesus' resurrection over and over again. They would not deny it. And all of them died for it. If you think about Peter who denied Jesus three times during the crucifixion, can you picture him now standing strong at the threat of death? Well, he did—and gave his life up for it. His actions show that he saw Jesus and nothing scared him anymore. He knew that Jesus had won the victory over death and he was no longer afraid to die for following Jesus.

Third, 1 Corinthians 15:6 says that **over 500 people saw Jesus alive.** If one person said she saw a dead man walking again, we'd probably bring her to a psych hospital. If 10 said it, we'd maybe think they were conspiring together. But if 500 people said they saw him, I think we'd go and check it out. And that's what people did. They checked it out and believed. We might think that those 1st century people were a bunch of unsophisticated suckers. Well, don't be so quick to judge. Do you think they would just believe anything? I'm sure they checked their sources just as we would. They checked and double-checked the facts. They talked to as many of those 500 witnesses as they could and the story checked out. As a result, the Christian faith grew despite heavy persecution.

Fourth, there was no evidence to the contrary. No one proved that Jesus was still dead. All the sceptics—Roman, Jewish or otherwise—would only have to go to the tomb and bring the body of Jesus out for everyone to see and the gig would be up. Some people

argue that the disciples had hidden Jesus' body, but certainly the Romans with their interrogation methods would have been able to make one of the disciples cough up the location. But that didn't happen. And no one to this day has found the body of Jesus because he is alive and at the right hand of his Father in heaven.

And **fifth, the growth of the church** speaks to the reality of the resurrection. In the most hostile environment where people were persecuted and died for their faith in Jesus, the church grew like wildfire. By the fourth century, Christianity had covered the whole western world and even the Roman Emperor Constantine was now a Christian! The church didn't grow simply because it promoted love and peace and joy. It grew because Jesus really did rise from the dead and changed people's lives by the power of his Holy Spirit.

My friends, the women at the tomb did not remain silent about the empty tomb. If they had and if others had, Mark would never have had a story to tell. The fact that he does tell the story of the resurrection of Jesus indicates that these women found their voices eventually. And the other three gospels fill us in on what those women and others said and did in response to the resurrection of Jesus. They were definitely changed by his resurrection power at work in them.

Mark doesn't share more with us about the change in the women because all throughout his gospel he wants us to commit to following Jesus. He shows us time and again what other people say about Jesus. And now at the end, after Jesus has risen from the dead and the tomb is empty, he wants us to grapple with the question: who do we think Jesus is?

Who Do YOU say Jesus is?

So let's do that. Having heard the gospel, including all that occurred on Good Friday, and having heard the proof of the resurrection, who do YOU say Jesus is? Mark's ending of the resurrection story with the women's silence forces us as readers to say, "Wait! The gospel can't end in silence! The so-called 'Greatest Story Ever Told' can't become the greatest story that is *never* told!" No, the gospel cannot end in silence.

And it didn't. The whole New Testament and the last 2000 years of gospel proclamation have told the good news of Jesus dying for sinners and rising from the dead. Now we can know and believe that he has reconciled us to God. The Christian message is one of hope. You don't have to worry about your own failures and your weaknesses. Jesus has paid for it all. Already in the Old Testament, God tells us,

*Is 53:6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to his own way;
and the LORD has laid on him (that is, Jesus)
the iniquity of us all.*

Only Jesus could pay for our sins. By believing in him, we are promised in this life already a foretaste of the eternal life that is ours where there will be no sin, no sorrow, no pain, and no tears or brokenness. In this life already, Jesus who rose from the dead comes into our lives as we put our faith in him. In his resurrection strength, he helps us love one another. He helps reconcile broken relationships—resurrect them, you might

say—even as he reconciles us to God. He helps us see beyond our current hardships even as he works all things together for our good. Jesus makes us new creatures who begin to experience the power of our resurrected Lord now already as we overcome sin, overcome fear and overcome much of the brokenness we experience in this world. My friends, remember this: If death couldn't hold Jesus down, then none of our problems in this life are too big for him to handle either!

Will you trust him with your life? You won't be sorry if you do. In fact, you'll be changed, just like the women at the tomb were. Just like the disciples were. Just like I have been and many others around you this morning.

My friends, the resurrection can't end in silence. We all need to answer the question, Who do you say Jesus is? If you say he's the risen Son of God, the one who died for my sins and rose to conquer sin, death and hell for me, then you're a Christian! And then you can't keep silent. We can't be indifferent, and we don't have to be afraid. Jesus, who strengthened the women at the tomb, his disciples and the five hundred, and Jesus who has strengthened and saved his people throughout history, will strengthen and empower us in this world. He's with us through thick and thin. He helps us live in the comfort of knowing that we belong to him now and for eternity. And what a difference that makes in life! It's worth shouting out!

Who is Jesus? We know the answer! He's our resurrected Saviour and Lord. And that's not something to keep quiet about.

And all God's people say, Amen.