

“Don’t Be Alarmed – He has Risen” Mark 16:1-8
Easter 2024

I am thankful to God for the opportunity to gather with you this Easter morning and share with other like-minded pastors from around the world to retell the story again, reminding us all that the tomb is open and empty. The words from Mark are the words we need for Easter 2024, hearing from the tomb, “Don’t be alarmed; he has risen!” It is the good news. We need to believe and listen, hearing those exact words.

“He has risen” are sacred words, words of amazement, hope, life, and resurrection. Everything has changed. We are new people. Jesus is not only risen; he is standing!

The Apostle Paul writes in the fifteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians, beginning in verse 12, “But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³ If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴ And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless, and so is your faith. ¹⁵ More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if, in fact, the dead are not raised. ¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. ¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. ¹⁹ If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.”

Then, Paul finishes out the chapter by writing in verse 50. “I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. ⁵¹ Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— ⁵² in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. ⁵³ For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord, your labor is not in vain.”

Would you be with me as we pray together once again?

Dear God, thank you for loving us so much that you gave your one and only son, Jesus, to save us from sin and death. Thank you because we now have hope for eternal life by accepting Him as Redeemer and friend, Lord and Savior. Amen.

Very early on the first day of the week, and while it was still dark that first Easter morning, Mary Magdalene trekked to the tomb before sunrise. Why? Mary wanted to anoint his corpse with oil. To touch him one last time. To say goodbye. She was still in shock. But when she arrived, Mary noticed something fishy about the way the stone over the grave had been moved. Mary assumed she would find the body of Jesus wrapped up tightly in burial linens, but his body was missing. You can see her thinking to herself. Had she looked in the wrong spot? In the same way, if you went to the grave of a loved one only to see the headstone cracked in two and mounds of freshly dug dirt all around, most likely, you would not jump into the hold to see if

the casket was still there. I would probably quickly run to call for help. Any undertaker would tell us that dead folks do not do a lot for themselves. When you are dead, you are dead—end of story. But the resurrection of Jesus is a divine act of defiance to the power of death. The resurrection says, Hold on, not so fast; don't be alarmed, there is more to the story.

The text from Mark gives us more to the story. The text is the climax of the gospel story in about as understated a way as can be imagined. The entire story appears to be purposely kept on the level of ordinary expectations. Mark does not give us any details of any amazement of pre-dawn earthquakes or any soldiers fainting dead away. But we know how Mark writes, always writing in a manner of hurried excitement. Mark does not describe the moment Jesus emerged from the tomb (actually, no evangelist witnessed Jesus leaving the tomb). The gospels of Mark and John begin with the words, *“Very early on the first day of the week while it was still dark.”* And so, we see this story on the level of ordinary expectations except for when Mark leaves us all hanging at the end of the chapter, ending with verse 8. “Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone because they were afraid.” End of story! Period. Exclamation. It's time to move on.

As a side note, you might encounter extra verses 9-20 in your Bible. These verses were not original to the first Greek manuscripts and were foreign to Mark's authenticity and writing style. Since 1611, they have only been believed to have been added by scribes at some later date. In the final critical analysis, there is only debate about whether this particular text belongs in the Bible, not over whether any truth is missing, only a patchwork drawn from various New Testament texts from the other gospels and the book of Acts.

Anyhow, the question remains. Why would Mark write such a compelling account of Jesus's life and ministry only to end in such a way as to leave his readers hanging, leaving out every appearance of Jesus following the scene at the tomb? For on that day, there was an over-the-top kind of morning. We read about Mary Magdalene's love and her practicality as a female mind. She thinks ahead, saying, “Who will handle the stone and roll it away from the tomb entrance when we get there? But when they got there, the thing that they feared ended up being something they didn't need to be bothered about because the stone had already been rolled back. It was not rolled back so Jesus could get out. No, it was rolled back so that others could go in and see that Jesus was no longer there. We learn that “When the typical expectations are shattered by the new thing God has done, our amazement and awe will become more outstanding when we realize that Easter happens when there is victory over death.” Jesus' final victory came through the grave clothes, which he left all folded neatly and in a perfect position inside the tomb. He had conquered the grave, alive again in eternal form.

The angel was there, a young man described by Mark as a picture of triumph as he sat there on the stone, and we encountered him saying, “Don't be alarmed.” I know you are looking for Jesus. He is not here. He is risen. Yet, we read that “They were alarmed.” Here, these women had brought the spices to anoint the dead body. While they may have been alarmed and in fear, I believe they were indeed trembling with excitement at this miracle of miracles. Why wouldn't they be trembling? They had encountered a moment in history that was going to change history forever. Isn't that why you are here today? Has this moment in history changed your life to give you hope of eternal life beyond the tomb? I shouldn't have to tell you what I believe.

Recently, I had the pleasure of reading a relatable Easter story about a young boy who asked his grandmother why she had so many wrinkles on her hands. She replied, “I'm old.”

Without hesitation, the young boy countered, “Do you know what happens when you get old? Before she could say anything, he added, But that’s ok; God comes and unburies you.”

There you have it, the Easter story. The circumstances of life bury us, and God brings us back to life. Again and again, God comes to the tombs of our lives and unburies us. That is Easter and the power and love of God. The truth is that in so many ways in our lives, we get buried through the circumstances of life. Whether it be sorrow or grief, death and loss, fear and anxiety, perfectionism, anger, guilt, regret, resentment, and all those in between that we have done or left undone are those stones that mark the ways we have suffered death, whether physical, emotionally, or spiritually.

Every day, a new type of ‘ism’ arises, and we become subject to every passing idea and fad of modernism rejecting Christ. Two major approaches have emerged in the wake of Theological modernism. The “liberal” view and the “traditional view.” In reflection on the fad of liberal modernism, a quote is given by the author Robert Harris, who says, “We do not need a Church that will move with the world, but a Church that will MOVE the world.” Friends, the only church that will move the world is a church that is absolutely convinced that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is an authentic fact based on eyewitness testimonies and that it is incomparable and indispensable. Now more than ever, in this dark, plague-ridden world, your family, friends, and neighbors are looking for hope. Brothers and sisters, the living Christ is the only hope for us all.

In closing, life on this earth is short, and death is the inescapable reality for all of us. For those who have faith and believe, our souls will not cease to exist after death; instead, we will stand in judgment before God. Christ’s death and resurrection are incomparable works that reconcile repentant sinners to God. A risen Lord is the indispensable foundation of our faith. A living Lord can only be a Savior because he has died for our sins. Thanks be to God, who grants us victory through Christ! Friends, don’t be alarmed. He has risen! Amen