

**“He is Risen!”**  
**Mark 16:1-8**  
**Holiday Island Presbyterian Church**  
**April 21, 2019**

**INTRODUCTION:**

**And so . . . once again we come to Easter!**

**Jesus had entered Jerusalem**

**to confront the Roman authorities**

**who were oppressing the people**

- through excessive taxation**
- through interfering with their worship**

**and to confront the temple authorities**

**- the elders, priests and scribes**

**- who were working in collusion with the Romans**

**- and who were manipulating the people**

**under the guise of religious laws and language.**

**Jesus had been telling His disciples**

**the inevitable outcome of this confrontation**

**would lead to His death.**

**Maybe they heard Jesus predictions about His death . . . maybe.**

**Most likely, it was sort of how we look at our own death.**

**It is a date on a calendar out there in the future -**

**- and we don't think too much about it.**

**We don't want to think much about it.**

**But we *know* it's there.**

**And maybe they *heard* Jesus  
when He said He would come back from death.  
If they did, the either forgot  
or simply dismissed it without grasping the truth of it.**

**At this point in our journey to Easter,  
Jesus has been arrested . . .  
. . . He has been crucified . . . .  
. . . He has been pronounced dead . . .  
. . . and He has been buried.**

**All of that is observable fact -  
- and indeed, at least some of the disciples actually witnessed it.  
There is NO speculation here!  
- Jesus was arrested  
- Jesus was tried and convicted  
- Jesus was crucified  
- Jesus was dead  
- Jesus had been buried**

**Period.**

**Not a single one of the disciples  
disputed any part of what I have just reported.  
It was verifiable - it had been witnessed - it was over.**

### **FACING EASTER:**

**A very zealous soul-winning young preacher  
happened to come upon an Iowa farmer working in his field.  
Being concerned about the farmer's soul  
the preacher asked the man,  
“Are you laboring in the vineyard of the Lord my good  
man?”**

**Not even looking at the preacher  
and continuing his work the farmer replied,  
“Naw, these are soybeans.”**

**“You don’t understand,” said the preacher. “Are you a Christian?”**

**With the same amount of interest as his previous answer the farmer  
said, “Nope my name is Jones.  
You must be looking for Jim Christian.  
That’s his place about a mile south of here.”**

**The young determined preacher tried again -  
he asked the farmer, “Are you lost?”**

**“Naw! I’ve lived here all my life,” answered the farmer.**

**Thoroughly frustrated,  
the preacher asked: “Are you prepared for the resurrection?”**

**This caught the farmer’s attention  
he stopped his work, looked at the preacher and asked,  
“When’s it gonna be?”**

**Thinking he had accomplished something  
the young preacher replied,  
“It could be today, tomorrow, or the next day.”**

**Taking a handkerchief from his back pocket and wiping his brow,  
the farmer remarked,  
“Well, don’t mention it to my wife.  
She don’t get out much and she’ll wanna go all three days.”**

**One of the reasons that story is so funny  
is that it captures the very essence of miscommunication.**

**Living on *this* side of the Resurrection,  
we wonder,  
“Why in the world didn’t the disciples understand?!?”**

**Everything Jesus had said to them  
had proven to be absolutely true.  
Even the prediction of His own death.**

**So *why* were they so caught off guard by the Resurrection?**

**To understand that,  
we have to dig a little deeper into our scripture for the day.**

### **DISTRACTED BY LIFE:**

**Our scripture tells us:**

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb <sup>3</sup> and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"

**Because Jesus died just before the beginning of the Sabbath,  
He had to be buried - laid in the tomb -  
- without the benefit of proper preparation.**

**So, these three women  
were on their way to the tomb**

**to finish the job of preparing Jesus for eternal rest.**

**Carrying what must have been a considerable amount of spices,  
these women face a problem  
that sits in the middle of their agenda  
like a giant boulder in the middle of a soybean field!**

**The focus of their thoughts is on moving that rock.**

**There is no speculation of:**

**“I wonder if He’s still there?”**

**“Do you suppose He’s up yet?”**

**“It’s been three days . . . that tomb could be empty.”**

**Nope. None of that.**

**The women are totally focused on the problem at hand:  
how to move that rock.**

**The fiery young preacher**

**is trying to have a conversation with the farmer  
about his eternal destiny . . .**

**. . . and the farmer is so focused on his soybeans  
that he doesn’t catch what the preacher is saying.**

**It is an ABSOLUTE fact of life -  
- that we get *distracted* by life!**

**Life - with all its demands,  
and frustrations,  
and surprises,**

**And roadblocks**

**And rocks in our way**

**Keeps us from focusing on what *really* matters.**

**Ever get a hangnail?  
Or a little rock in your shoe?  
Or chapped lips?**

**Those things can occupy more of your time!  
They become the focus of our day.  
And we find it really hard to think about other things.**

**It's life . . . it's not necessarily sinful . . . it's just life.**

## **GOD AND OUR PROBLEMS:**

Now, take a look at the rest of the scripture for today:

<sup>4</sup> But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away.

<sup>5</sup> As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.

<sup>6</sup> "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. <sup>7</sup> 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.'"

What these women *expected*

- was to find a huge stone they would have to move
- was to find the body of Jesus right where they had left it

What these women *found*

- was totally unexpected!

The stone had been moved . . .

. . . the tomb was empty

. . . and an angel (we think) had a message for them.

Jesus is NOT here!

He has risen!

I like the wry humor Mark used in writing this.

. . . finding the stone rolled away

. . . finding an empty tomb

. . . confronted by an angel

. . . the women were . . . *alarmed*.

That's not exactly how I would react . . .

. . . *alarm* is far too mild!

**Why?**

**Why this reaction to what had been predicted?  
Shouldn't this be *happy* news?**

**Why didn't Mark say,**

**“Seeing the stone rolled away and finding the tomb empty  
*the women rejoiced and danced for joy!*”**

**The reason is:**

**We have *faith* that God will keep all the promises God has made  
to us . . .**

**. . . we just don't *expect* God to actually keep those promises  
and we are caught completely off-guard  
when God actually provides for us!**

**Mark recorded the most likely - and absolutely human - response:**

**They were “alarmed.”**

**It left them “trembling and bewildered.”**

**Sarah laughed at God**

**and God blessed this very old women  
with the birth of a child.**

**Jacob encountered God -**

**- and he limped for the rest of his life.**

**Moses encountered God -**

**- and spent 40 years in the wilderness caring for God's people.**

**When we encounter God -**

**- when God entered our life -**

**- we are changed!**



**And that alarms us!**

**Most of us approach God with a problem . . .  
... and offer God a solution . . .  
... or a menu of solutions.**

**Few of us approach God empty-handed  
willing to accept whatever God offers us.**

**And almost all of us  
are surprised . . . alarmed . . .  
... when God moves the stones in our lives  
because we just didn't *expect* it to happen.  
Not really.**

**THE GIFT OF EASTER:**

**And so . . . we come to Easter.**

**The culmination of all that God had promised.**

**The tomb is empty!  
Christ has risen!  
The story has a happy ending!**

**Where we *thought* the story had ended . . .  
... the death and burial of Jesus -  
- God said clearly to us:  
“It's not over till God says it's over!”**

**Where we - in our limited human sight - see an end to the story,  
God reminds us that only God can write the final chapter.**

**Where we see huge stones in our path -**

- and we obsess over how to move them out of our way -
- God says to us:  
“Trust me!”

When we exhaust our earthly strength -  
- both physical and emotional strength -  
- God says to us: “Lean on me!”

When the flood waters rise and destroy our homes and businesses -  
- when the winds blow and flatten our towns -  
- when the fires rage and burn down everything we built up -  
- when companies no longer need our services -  
- when the daylight in our souls turns to blackest night . . .  
. . . God is there with us!

The message of the tomb  
is not just that there is life after death . . .

The message of the tomb  
is that when all is said and done . . .  
. . . it is God who gets to decide how the story ends!

And for those who trust in God . . .  
. . . that story *always* has a surprising ending!

### **CONCLUSION:**

There is no way that I could know the contents of your life . . .  
. . . but I do know the contents of mine!  
And I have spent most of my adult life  
observing human nature.

This much I know about every person in this room . . .  
. . . you either currently *have* a problem in your life  
. . . or you are about to have a problem in your life.

**I don't mean a small one like misplacing your car keys  
or a late fee because you forgot to pay a bill,  
or a coffee pot that stopped making coffee.**

**I mean a problem that is so big it occupies most of your thoughts.**

**That problem may seem like the biggest thing in your life right now.  
And maybe it is.**

**But I would encourage you to remember  
that the God of the Empty Tomb  
is an expert at solving problems.**

**Do your best . . . and trust God to do the rest.**

**And if your problem is one that is spiritual in nature -  
- if you feel you have grown apart from God  
- or maybe never had a close relationship with God  
- today is the day to change all of that.**

**Let me close with Luke's pronouncement:**

**"Why do you look for the living among the dead?  
He is not here, he is risen!"**

**Glory! Hallelujah!  
He is risen!**

**PRAYER:**

**Tomb emptying and Grace giving God, once again we  
celebrate Your boundless grace given to us through Jesus our  
Savior. Although we cannot *see* an empty tomb, let us be drawn to  
the Risen Christ. Bolster our belief. In the name of the Risen Christ.**

**Amen**