**Mark 16:1-7** April 4, 2021

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*Mark 16:1When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus’ body. 2Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb 3and they asked each other, “Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?”*

*4But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. 5As 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. 7But go, tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.’ ”*

Dear Friends in Christ,

**Just As He Told You**

**I. Just As He Told You, He Has Risen**

You don’t buy a casket unless you are going to use it. I mean, if people came over and saw a casket sitting in your garage or storage closet, what would they say? Here’s a little tangent to this very point. Long, long ago, when Christian missionaries were sent to a foreign mission field, let’s say, a three months’ voyage away, do you know how they packed their belongings? They shipped them in their own caskets. That’ll make you think.

The women of our reading were carrying a first-century Jewish casket. By that I mean, they were expecting to put someone to rest. In their time and place, many people were not buried in the ground, but placed in a tomb carved into solid rock. Instead of placing the body in a casket, the body of the deceased would be placed on a rock ledge in that tomb, and then nature would take its course. There would be a burial cloth and spices to hide the gruesome details: the burial cloth to hide the visual and the spices to hide the smell. So ***“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”*** (1). These women were carrying the casket for Jesus. You don’t buy a casket unless you expect to use it.

For these women, their state of mind must have been close to nervous breakdown. This happened in Jerusalem. Jerusalem was not their home. They had been on a religious pilgrimage far from home. In strange Jerusalem, things had been going well, and suddenly their leader was arrested. Jesus was rushed through the courts and gruesomely executed. Imagine that! Imagine taking a vacation with a group of friends to Pennsylvania or Wisconsin or Oklahoma or wherever. And suddenly *that* happens to the leader of your group. No way to get the body back, the authorities on your trail, you have to bury quickly in a strange place. These women had seen it all, and likely feared for their own lives. The sense of shock and sorrow and horror and fear and everything else must have been overwhelming. Frankly, I’m surprised they even able to do this! What devotion to Jesus!

But when they reached the Jesus’ tomb, there was another surprise. As if the shock were not enough already, here in the dawning light of the first day of the workweek, inside the tomb, they found a smartly dressed young man. As if reading their thoughts he says, ***“Don’t be alarmed. You are looking for Jesus…, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here!”*** (6). Nothing is making sense. These ladies had just put the body here 36 hours earlier. No body? He has risen? The women who had laid his body in the tomb were the same ones who came for burial. That is why the Gospel of Mark names names. People of his day could go to the same people and ask about it. He admits, “What I’m telling you sounds like nonsense. But if you doubt, go ask them.”

It doesn’t make sense, does it? Death is death. It is final. Whether grandparents or children. We pray desperately for people on the edge, but once they are gone, we stop. Death is final. Saying silly things like “He has risen” is worse than bad taste.

The Old Testament reading used this picture of death: *“the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations.”* Death is the great enemy to all times and places. It might come in different forms: malaria or malnutrition in Africa, heart disease and cancer in America, the violence of war in Yemen or Afghanistan. But the result is the same. This shroud covers all people. What is this angel saying?

His words were not lies or deception. They were not a bad joke. There was no body. Then the angel added a word of gentle rebuke: ***“just as he told you.”*** The angel says that these women should not have come with the casket, the spices. They should have known that there would be no corpse. All these bizarre and strange happening were just like Jesus had said.

Indeed! Even to those who did not believe in him, Jesus had hinted at it. He had said, *“As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.”* (Mt 12:40). To his own disciples, Jesus explained it plainly, *“He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.”* He said so repeatedly (Mk 8:31; 9:12; 10:33; 14:28; etc.). He had even laid down the timeline for it. What had they done with those words? Had they just dismissed it as ‘crazy talk’?

Jesus had tried to get them ready for this moment. He had warned them about the whole thing because he wanted them to understand why he had come to this world. As he told them, he did not *“come to be served, but to give his life as a ransom.”* He wanted them to understand his work of saving from sin, and rising to open eternal life in heaven to all. But if they could not fathom it at the time, he at least wanted them to now look back at what he had said and to say to themselves, “Yes, it must have been so! He told us. We just weren’t able to understand.”

**II. Just As He Told You, You Will Rise**

Jesus’ words prophesying his death and resurrection were meant for us as well. When that angel said, ***“[Jesus] has risen… just as he told you”*** he also speaks to us.

The old proverb says, “There are only two things for certain in this life: death and taxes.” But we know that some people even manage to avoid taxes. There is really only one certainty in life. Jesus’ not only spoke of his own death *and life,* he spoke also of ours.

Jesus had peppered all of his teaching with this theme. He kept coming back to life after death, not only his own, but also ours. At the funeral of his friend Lazarus he said, *“Your brother will rise again… He who believes in me will live, even though he dies”* (John 11:23-25). When he told the parable about weeds and wheat, he explained, *“So it will be at the end of the age… The righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father”* (Matthew 13:40-43). When Jesus looked beyond his own death and resurrection, he said, *“A time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear [my] voice and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned”* (John 5:28-29).

What happened at that tomb to Jesus was just as he had told these distraught women and the other disciples many times. It was the same thing that he tells us will happen to each of us. If it was impossible for Jesus to rise, then it would be so for us. But if he rose just as he promised, then we need to take seriously what Jesus said about our own futures after this life.

We naturally think the conclusion of life is death, like some sort of morbid math equation. Jesus would have us add a function to the equation. AND the natural conclusion of death is eternal life for all who believe in him.

**III. Just as He Told You, He Wants To Meet With You**

The angel said that Jesus had risen, ***“Just as he told you.”*** They should have known!

Seeing Jesus rise from the dead was supposed to encourage them that they too would rise, ***“Just as he told you.”***

And there was one more thing these women were supposed to remember and remind the disciples Jesus had said, ***“Go, tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.”***

Jesus’ work of redeeming sinful mankind was done. But his relationship with them was not. Jesus’ relationship with his people, them in this reading and us, is not merely that he saved us. Not like some sort of Abraham Lincoln who thousands of miles away issued some decree to free us from slavery to sin, death and the devil, but we never meet the man, nor have anything to do with him after the moment of freedom. Jesus wants us to stay close to him all our lives.

Here is a true mystery of the infinite God. How many really close friends do you have? Most people can only have one or two really, really close friends. We just are not capable of more than that. We don’t have the time and emotional energy for more than that. But God is different. He is intimately concerned with every single one of us. And so in our reading, Jesus assures those disciples that he wants some time with them. He tells them to go back to Galilee where it had all begun, where they had first heard and hoped for the Savior in Jesus. There they would reconnect with him.

In the angel’s words there was a divine message for one of Jesus’ close friends, Peter. That disciple had done something really, really bad. While Jesus was on trial and being ushered off to execution, Peter, had denied Jesus three times. It was even within earshot of Jesus. Ever heard a friend do that? The bottom drops out of your heart. But even to that one, Jesus risen from the dead had a special message – “I want to see all of my disciples up in Galilee, and that includes you Peter!” Do you ever feel like that – like you have made such a big mistake that you can never live it down? Take heart in Jesus’ words. As it says elsewhere in the Bible, a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, and a bruised reed he not will break. He is the friend of sinners, and he kindly welcomes every repentant sinner.

If only these women at the tomb and the disciples back in Jerusalem behind locked doors had really listened to Jesus, the day of Easter could have dawned just as joyful for them, as it has for us this morning.

But let’s not kid ourselves. We need to always more closely listen to the words of our Savior. Especially on this day of Jesus’ Resurrection, let us find joy in how he said he would rise, how he has promised us that we too shall rise, and how he invites us to continually meet with him. Amen.