

# “Amazement Had Seized Them”

Mark 16:1-8

Easter Sunday, April 8, 2007

Read text.

## 1. The Tomb Was Empty

There is one unmistakable point in this text: the tomb was empty. Jesus was not there. He had risen.

It is no wonder the women were seized with terror and amazement. It did not make sense – at least not in human terms. They had watched him suffer. They had watched him crucified. They had watched him die and they had watched him being laid in this tomb.

“What do you mean he is not here?” That’s a question that was probably asked more than once, even though Mark only gives us a brief part of the conversation.

“I don’t get it, what do you mean he was raised?”

They could see with their eyes that Jesus’ body was not there. They could hear with their ears the message from the young man dressed in a white robe. It still did not make sense and Mark tells us that the fled from the tomb, seized with terror and amazement, and they said nothing because they were afraid.

Why were they afraid?

They were afraid for some of the same reasons we are afraid. What were they going to tell their friends? Jesus got up from the dead? Who would believe them? They would not be credible, and they would have been reluctant to suffer any further – they had loved Jesus, followed him, and been crushed by watching him tormented, beaten and crucified. Their hearts were broken.

For the women, to have to explain that Jesus’ body was not in the tomb; well, to face the ridicule of others who would dismiss what they were saying – that would have simply compounded their grief.

For us, the fact that Mark reports that the women found the empty tomb *adds* to the historical credibility – and not simply because we are more sensitive. Rather, their lack of status and their inclusion in Mark’s account suggests he is reporting what happened – not what should have happened.

Attempts to explain away the empty tomb have been abundant. We have witnessed another version this year, James Cameron’s “discovery” of the bones of Jesus in a tomb has come and gone. “We found him – at least, a statistically high probability that we found him” was the claim.

Nonsense.

Very quickly, scholars from around the world made clear that the bones Cameron filmed were not Jesus' bones. It was a sensational story in support of a television program, but it had no lasting value. Another version of this came a few years ago, when it was argued that the women went to the wrong tomb. The young man, knowing that they were in the wrong place said, "He's not here; look (pointing) that's where they laid him." He pointed to the next tomb, but the women mistook his meaning and saw the empty tomb in which the young man had been working.

Nonsense.

If that had been the case, the confusion would have been resolved quickly; and if not quickly, soon enough with the closest disciples beginning to talk about seeing the risen Jesus. The early church's confession was clear: Jesus was raised. The word for resurrection has the connotation that the grave yielded up the body; that it was not strong enough to hold Jesus.

The empty tomb continues to be a scandal. Theologians continue to try to find a way to explain it away; that the resurrection is simply a metaphor for God's continuing love for us.

Nonsense.

If Jesus did not actually, physically rise from the dead, our faith is in vain and we are still lost in our sins.

The tomb was empty because God raised Jesus from the dead. God did exactly what Jesus said he would do; God did exactly what the prophets said the Christ would do.

The Bible is not like CSI – it does not give us the forensic science of how the resurrection took place. That is not important to Mark. The power of the resurrection and the meaning of the resurrection are so much more important.

All we have is witness testimony. It still requires us to weigh the credibility of the witnesses. The question is whether you can believe the One who reveals himself through Scripture

Paul would say this later, "For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength."

Friends, the testimony of the women that first morning, the testimony of the church throughout time since then, the testimony of Presbyterian Churches all across the country, the testimony of Christian churches here throughout Chula Vista and all around the world, and the testimony of believers in this congregation is this: Jesus Christ is risen, he is risen indeed.

## 2. Jesus is who Mark says He is

This morning, we conclude our sermon series through the gospel of Mark. He wrote to early believers in Rome, encouraging them to remain steadfast in their belief despite persecutions and oppression by the Roman Emperor. As you remember, he set out the point of the entire gospel in the first line: “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, Son of God,” was the opening of Mark. He set out to show how Jesus Christ was gospel – that is, good news.

Jesus began his ministry with a proclamation, “The time is fulfilled, the Kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news.” His ministry was characterized by a series of amazing events, demonstrating his power and raising up the question, “Who is this?”

He called the disciples and they followed.

He delivered a man from an unclean spirit and taught with authority.

He healed Peter’s mother in law, he healed lepers and the lame.

He was presented with the paralyzed man on a mat. He said, “Son, your sins are forgiven.” There was grumbling because only God had the authority to declare that sins were forgiven; Jesus’ response is instructive here this morning, “Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Stand up take your mat and walk’? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins,” – he said to the paralytic, “I say to you, stand up, take your mat, and go to your home.”

He calmed the sea. He went to non-Jewish land and commanded out the legion of demons from the man in the tombs; he brought back to life and community the man who was living in hell. He brought back from the dead the daughter of the leader of the synagogue.

He fed the multitudes.

Who do you say that I am? Jesus asked the disciples. “You are the Christ,” said Peter, speaking for the disciples and all of Israel.

Immediately after Peter’s confession, Jesus begins to tell them of the work of the Son of God: that he would go to Jerusalem; be rejected by the chief priests, scribes, and elders; that he would be crucified; and then that he would rise again in three days. The second half of Mark’s gospel is an extended Passion narrative; Jesus’ passion meaning his suffering on behalf of others.

All those things happen along the way, just as he told them – the rejection by the chief priests, the scribes and the Pharisees. They tried to trick Jesus, they tried to embarrass him, they tried to get him to make mistakes. He confounded them at every step.

He rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday using Messianic imagery, hearing the shouts of the crowd calling to him with messianic language. “Hosanna,” meaning “Save us Lord.” He taught,

he spoke, he responded; in all things he remained obedient to God's call on his life. "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

He was betrayed. He was deserted. He was arrested. He was charged. He was convicted of blasphemy, then brought to the Romans for the charge of sedition (or treason) for claiming someone other than Caesar was King of the Jews. In order to avoid a riot, Pilate washed his hands and delivered him to the guards. The guards beat and mocked him. They humiliated him and then they crucified him. Then, as Jesus breathed his last, a commander in the Roman guard – representing both Gentiles everywhere and the most powerful government in the world – confessed, "Truly this man was the Son of God," says the Centurion as he watches Christ crucified. He bore witness on behalf of the Gentiles.

But that was not the end of the story. Just as he told them, he rose from the dead. The tomb was empty. "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here."

To believers suffering persecution in Rome who wondered, "Is this worth it?"; to believers who wondered, "does it make any difference?"; to believers who doubted, "Could this really be true?"; Mark answers with a resounding, "Yes." Jesus is exactly who he said he is. He is the Christ. He is the Savior. He is the Son of God.

Jesus declared that the Kingdom of God was at hand. He commanded us, "Repent and believe the good news." Jesus' resurrection is the validation of everything he said, it is the foundation for everything he commanded, it is the hope of the future now revealed.

Repent. Believe the good news. Believe it because it really is good news.

### **3. Jesus' resurrection is good news to share**

Obviously, the resurrection is good news for Jesus. But does it make any difference for anyone else? For example, Tiger Woods' ability on the golf course is good news for Tiger Woods, but does it make any eternal difference to anyone else?

Jesus' resurrection is eternal good news for you and eternal good news for me. Tiger Woods' proficiency on the golf course will one day diminish and fade; the power on display in Jesus' resurrection will never diminish or fade. Tiger plays for Tiger – yes, some of the money goes to charity – but his primary concern is winning and establishing his own place in history. Jesus died and rose again for you and me. His primary concern was glorifying God and fulfilling God's plan for your salvation and my salvation. Jesus' victory changed calendars, it changed cultures, it changed the world and it changed things for you and for me.

The resurrection applies to you and me because *Jesus said* it applies to you and me. The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many." He gave his life for ours. He came to redeem us; that is, to *give us* freedom from bondage and slavery to sin and death.

Death no longer holds power over him. Thus, he is able to help us. Having defeated the grave, living and reigning with God, Jesus now is calling you and me to join with him, to recognize our adoption as children of God, co-heirs of the Kingdom of God with him.

We are invited to life – we are invited to live. Righteousness has been reckoned to us – which is what happens when we confess with our mouth that Jesus Christ is Lord and believe in our heart that God raised him from the dead.

We can endure suffering because we know it will pass. We can be patient because we are living into eternity. We can have hope because we know the one in whom we hope. We can persist in working for justice because we know that justice will reign in the kingdom of God. We can love because we know the one who loves us.

What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Friends, when you struggle in your life, where do you find hope? Your money may be able to help, but it cannot save you. Science may be able to help, but it cannot save you. The government may be able to help, but it cannot save you. Your friends may be able to help, but they cannot save you. Your family may be able to help, but they cannot save you.

The Risen Lord Jesus Christ comes to you today, and asks you the question he asked of his disciples, “Who do you say I am?”

You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God. You are one who was obedient unto death, even death on a cross. You are the one God raised from the dead, the one whom God highly exalted and gave the name that is above every name; that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

If you have never answered that question, “Who do you say I am?”; if you have never made that confession, I urge you to do so this morning. As the service concludes we will have people up

front to pray with you and for you. If the Holy Spirit is convicting your heart this morning – for the first time or once again – I encourage you to come forward.

The gospel is the power of God unto salvation for all who believe – including you and including me.

#### **4. Conclusion**

So, as we conclude this morning, we find ourselves back at the confession of the early church, we find ourselves back where we began worship this morning. I invite you to join with me:

Christ is risen! HE IS RISEN INDEED!

Christ is risen! HE IS RISEN, INDEED!

Christ is risen! HE IS RISEN, INDEED!

Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Amen and amen.

That is our testimony, that is our hope, that is our gospel to proclaim. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

8:45 (offering)

10:00 (final hymn – For Thine Is The Glory)