



Auburn Presbyterian Church

Passionately loving the Lord Jesus Christ and radiating that love to everyone

13025 Bell Air Drive, Auburn, CA 95603 (530) 823-3916 apc@auburnpresbyterian.org

“Hallelujah! Death Is Done!” Mark 16:1-8; Isaiah 25:6-9; 1 Cor. 15:1-11 Resurrection Day!

It's Resurrection Day! Followers of Jesus jump up to praise God for raising Jesus from the grave. But to people who don't yet know Jesus, Christians believe some pretty crazy things, I have to admit. Everyone knows that “once you're dead, you're dead”. Thursday night, we read aloud the whole Passion account—Jesus beaten, bloodied, body torn--and then hung naked in public to slowly die by exposure and asphyxiation. And his killers succeeded. From the evidence, Jesus was really dead. Very dead. Dead, indeed.

It was early that first Easter morning—which I prefer to call “Resurrection Day”. While it was still dark, women went to the tomb where the body of their leader Jesus had been laid. What they discovered there changed their lives, changed history, changed the meaning of life, forever.

But isn't this just a tale, written to keep our spirits up when times are tough? The evidence—at least from Mark's gospel—seems pretty weak. Let me show you what I mean. Open your Bibles to the last chapter of Mark, which is chapter 16. There are two endings, you will see. The oldest manuscripts carry only the first ending, so I'll stick with that, just verses 1-8. Listen for God's voice coming to you through these words. *[text]*

“Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.” The end. Really? That's it—they were afraid? There are no appearance accounts, of Jesus showing up to his disciples or others? Where's the hallelujah? Where's the birth of hope in the hearts of Jesus' followers? Was this account put in by mistake?

Wait--that makes no sense. What compilers aiming at faith would include an account of Jesus' life and ministry that leaves off at the empty tomb?

We are pretty sure Mark is the earliest of the gospel records; both Matthew's and Luke's gospels copy many direct quotes from Mark's record. On this Easter Day of resurrection, I want to tune into some important contributions Mark's gospel gives us, especially because his account is so short. And with those gifts from God's Word, I want to ask you some questions.

Mark seems to have written the “Cliff's Notes” version of Jesus' life. Mark has no birth or nativity stories. He has no appearance of Jesus himself after the empty tomb had been discovered. How can we understand this? Well, as the earliest gospel taken from eyewitnesses, Mark was creating his written record for a community of believers who themselves had seen Jesus alive in his resurrection body. They knew full well that their Lord had triumphed over death. They did not need a record of resurrection; instead, Mark was serving them by preserving these notes of Jesus' adult life and ministry.

Frankly, as Mark especially shows, Jesus' disciples were not too bright. Even up to and through his death, they do not understand him at all. And Jesus knew it. How utterly discouraging. These guys had been with him for some three years, and yet they had never been "with" him, except for brief flashes of insight. Very brief. Jesus' torture and death had been the death of their illusions about him bringing together an army of God's people to drive out the occupation forces of Rome from God's promised land, restoring the Kingdom of Israel in a "golden age". Jesus was dead. No one believed that stuff about him any more. They grieved the death of their Lord and the death of their dreams. They were in hiding—afraid that they might be picked up as co-conspirators, and soon could be looking down from their own crosses.

But then, Jesus came to them. Yes, Jesus! They couldn't believe it—could not believe HIM! But in time they came to doubt their doubts and believe their beliefs. They began to remember the things Jesus had been telling them, month in and month out, during his ministry. And hope came alive—a new life, a totally new world, a totally trustworthy God who would give such a gift to humankind.

I don't think any of Jesus' disciples recorded much on paper during his ministry, for they had been looking forward to the wrong thing, and virtually none of them were literary types, anyway. But seeing Jesus alive, and starting to talk about him (as they would in a month-and-a-half), they began to see the need to capture a record of the experiences they had shared with Jesus—even if it meant revealing how dense they had been as his disciples. Mark's record was a first draft of what would become preaching notes for Jesus' followers, to take with them in their travels to tell everyone God's great good news. There's no Hallelujah here because each witness carried their own Hallelujah already! I see Mark's account—even with this abrupt ending—as a highly reliable record.

But I want to return to the "fear" that is so prominent here. Why such fear from these women?

I can think of several reasons. 1) They were afraid to tell the disciples the awful news that Jesus' body had been stolen. I have a heart for the military officers who have the duty of visiting families with the news that their son or daughter has been killed in war. Sometimes, these officers bring the first notice of this tragedy, and they get the full force of fresh grief. I think these women were afraid of the danger that comes from bearing awful news.

2) I think these women were also afraid of not being believed because they were women—in those days, women were not allowed to testify in court, because "everyone knew women were unreliable, hysterical witnesses". Women were—almost by definition—foolish! How likely was it that these men—feeling this loss even more acutely because they were even closer to Jesus—would believe their female friends' second-hand report about an angel's message?

3) I think these women were also afraid because they found it hard to believe, themselves. This whole event was too strange. Have you ever seen a resurrection, a dead person walking around? I'm not talking about a resuscitation, where they put the defibrillator paddles on and shock a heart back into action again.

Some months ago, Joanne English offered a CPR class here, which included the "rescue breathing", "chest compression techniques", and (for my first time), instruction on using an

automatic defibrillator. Our church is buying one of these. These machines are really cool. You put some sticky wired patches on the victim's chest, and the machine detects the state of the person's heart, and whether it will do any good to shock them, or whether it will do more harm than good. The machine gives you spoken instructions about what you are to do next, at every step. But as Joanne told us, if there is no electrical activity in the heart, there is no use trying to shock such a heart into action. The jolt from the machine's battery can only help if there is still electrical activity there.

With Jesus, we're talking about a man who had been in the grave for two-plus days. Jesus was really dead. So for these women, who could they tell when what they had to say sounded unbelievable in their own hearts?

Dead people are done. It's over. Everybody knows that, from the beginning of time.

But Jesus DID appear. Listen to this summary of witnesses that had accumulated soon after Jesus' resurrection, as had been passed on to Jesus' reluctant champion, Paul of Tarsus: (1 Corinthians 15:1-10a, NIV)

Jesus did appear. Jesus was raised from the grave. So what do we have to do with our absolutely secure knowledge that "dead people are *done*"?? No, in Jesus, DEATH is DONE!

Death is done for Jesus, and death is "done" for all whom Jesus will bring with him, as he said in John 12:32.

But that's not all that is changed for those who cling to Master Jesus. When you know death is done for you, you can endure anything. You discover in yourself a love for God that starts growing and growing, like ripples in your soul that start with trusting the Risen Christ, and radiate out into more and more of your life.

It's like when you buy a car—it doesn't have to be a new one. But if you've settled on a car and you put your money down, and start driving it around--suddenly you start to notice how many of those cars (in various colors) are already on the road—and if it's a new car, as more get purchased, even more appear. How could you have not noticed them before?

Or, it's like falling in love. Suddenly, your perception changes. You start noticing more and more things that remind you of your beloved. "Ev'ry little breeze seems to whisper, 'Louise'. Birds in the trees seem to sing out, 'Louise' . . ." You hope you'll run into your beloved around every corner. You hope she will show up early for your date, so you can spend more time with her.

When you fall in love with God—when you realized how much God has always loved you—then you start seeing things everywhere that remind you of God. The sunrise reminds you of God's power and warmth, and you feel the pleasure of it. The fields of wildflowers remind you of God's creativity, and you savor the colors in the cool of the day. A friend is kind, and you get a glimpse of the love of God, and you thank God for your friend. Around every corner is another Hallelujah! You start to try to live and act more in a way that God would enjoy, for you want to please God more than anything. Not out of fear, but out of love. Jesus' resurrection changes fear to love.

I want to show you a video I found this past week. I love God. In my better moments, I see things that also reflect God's nature, and remind me why I love Him. Watch this video with me, and then we'll see what we see in it....

This father and son make up "Team Hoyt", and they have competed in many races, including the Ironman Triathlon, several times. When I see that father biking, pushing, towing his son, I see a picture of God, doing for us what we could not do for ourselves. Because we were helpless. And then, as we become followers of Jesus, I see in that father who I want to be, reaching people who know they are helpless (as I was), until I was helped by God. God is there, and I would be joining God in what God is doing.

See, when you're in love with God, you start to see God everywhere.

Of course, not everyone is a believer. And just as for those first women, FEAR is in full control. In the face of this highly-reliable record, and the hope that the living Lord brings, how else do we explain why so many refuse to follow Jesus? There are several fearful forces that buttress anyone's fear about following a Jesus who was dead but is alive.

Like the women, long-time skeptics would have to face ridicule if they changed their minds. The agnostics and atheist friends they used to enjoy will find it hard to tolerate this change in them. This is a fear of loss of friends.

And the Christ-life is new and totally unfamiliar. Everyone feels awkward when they enter a whole new group and start developing new holy habits and customs. We fear change—at least, most of us dislike it, most of the time. This is fear of change and fear of looking foolish

Another fear is a deep one. For the resurrection of Jesus to be real, many people have to change their whole world view. They face having to abandon the certainty that comes with the belief that people who die are "done". If you can't be sure of that, what *can* you be sure of?

And there's more. Life-long resurrection-deniers have to deal with being connected to the God who draws us into eternal life with His love, with the God who wants to transform us in ways that we would never have imagined. And if we're fearful people who have to be in control, trusting this God is really hard. We even need to ask God for help to trust God. It's like the man who came to Jesus in hope of healing for his son: "I believe, Lord. Help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24)

Do you want to believe? Do you want to move from death to hope, from control to trust, from doubt to love? Then let me guide you to a new life with God

that trusting God's Word provides. I'm going to pray a simple prayer, just saying to God, "Sorry," "Please," and "Thank You." If you have felt God tugging at you this morning and you want to cross the line to Christ, then in the quiet of your heart, repeat these phrases silently, after me. "O God, you are awesome." "You have loved me even when I did not pay You any attention." "I'm sorry for living my life without You." "Please apply the death of Jesus to me, to pay for my sin." "Please lead me closer to You." "Thank You for coming to live in me." "I give my life to You." "In Jesus' Name, I pray." (And all God's people said, *Amen.*)

If you prayed with me a moment ago, come for prayer here with our Prayer Team. Tell them you want to connect with the God who raises the dead, Who has loved you before you were born, and has a longing for you to join Him in what He is doing, in our own time, even now in calling you to trust Him.

For you, this Easter will be like no other.

But because he was once emptied, I am each day refilled;

My spirit-arteries pulse with the vital red of love;

*Poured out, it is his life that now pumps through my own heart's
core.*

He bled, and died, and I have been transfused.

--Luci Shaw (1928--)

Christ is Risen!
He is Risen, indeed!

[This sermon preached to the congregation of Auburn Presbyterian Church, Auburn, California
on Resurrection Day, April 12, 2009, by Rev. Kenneth B. Winter.]