

EASTER SUNDAY MESSAGE

The Dawn of a New Reality

Mountainview Alliance Church, Kitimat, BC

Pastor Ed Drewlo

Mark 16:1-8

April 24 - 11

Thanks to the team from Lakewood – Ken and Lenore and family, Dave and Bethany, Quindal and Joanne and family, Mitch and Andrea and family, Troy and Sherrynne, Konor and Keyarah, Sarah Allan, and Dan Hanson... You are a big encouragement. And travel these days is costly...

READ 16:1-8

As you probably know each of the Gospels gives a slightly different description of what took place on that first Easter morning as far as the sequence of events is concerned – which helps to prove that the story we have is really reliable. But all of the accounts talk about things getting started by some women being the first to go to the tomb on that first Easter morning. According to the story here in Mark, there were three of them:

- Mary Magdalene – who figures prominently in the story. She was the woman of Luke 8:2, 3 of whom Jesus delivered from terrible bondage to 7 demons. She must have been so grateful and became a devoted follower of his. She is one of the women there at the time of the crucifixion and she watches where they place his body. According to John, she is also the first person to talk with Jesus after his resurrection.
- Mary the Mother of James. Matthew 27 identifies her as the mother of James and Joses (Joseph). The James here is probably James, the son of Alphaeus, one of the disciples, sometimes called, James the Less to distinguish him from the other disciple called James (son of Zebedee or “James the more!”). She is also identified in another place as Mary of Clopas possibly meaning the wife of Clopas. She might also have been a cousin or relative of Mary, the mother of Jesus.
- Salome – she too might have been a relative of Mary’s -- possibly the younger sister of Mary the mother of Jesus. She also seems to be the mother of James and John, the sons of Zebedee the fishermen. She was the one who asked Jesus if her sons could sit with Jesus in his kingdom (Matthew 20:20). (All these Marys can be a little confusing.)

In any case, it must have been a sad little troupe of women that was walking to the tomb early on that historic Sunday morning. It's hard to imagine the *intense emotional pain* they must have felt about what they had just seen in Jesus' trial and crucifixion. (Think of it: they had just witnessed the painful crucifixion of their best friend and they couldn't do anything about it. They had stand helplessly by. But they were there.)

Mary, the actual mother of Jesus, though she had been at the crucifixion, was not among them. John, the disciple had taken her to his home. Her grief must have been overwhelming. Simeon's prophecy in Luke 2 that *a sword would pierce her own soul* -- was now being fulfilled.

I suppose there is no grief like the grief that comes to a parent whose child is suffering. As it is said, "Once a mother always a mother." Probably every mother here this morning knows something of that sorrow. That would undoubtedly have described Mary at this time but in a far greater way than we might ever imagine. And that was something too of the grief that her friends shared as they sadly wended their way to the tomb that early Sunday morning. Saturday would have been a very painful Sabbath for all of them.

As long as a person is alive, there is hope that something might change. But their friend had died! Death is so final. Any thoughts of hope these women might have had would now have been dashed.

Sooner or later we all know what it is to feel overwhelmed by disappointment and heavy sorrow. It's one of the realities of our lives here on earth. So many times in the course of our lives things don't immediately turn out like we imagine they will. And at least for a time (sometimes a long time) our hopes are dashed. Psalm 13 comes to mind:

*How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
How long must I wrestle with my thoughts
and every day have sorrow in my heart?
How long will my enemy triumph over me?*

*Look on me and answer, O LORD my God.
Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death;
my enemy will say, "I have overcome him,"
and my foes will rejoice when I fall.*

*But I trust in your unfailing love;
my heart rejoices in your salvation.
I will sing to the LORD,
for he has been good to me.*

So it must have been for these women.

But still they cared. They cared for his body because it had held the spirit and soul of the person they had loved so much. Out of love and respect they carry expensive spices to put on Jesus' body for a more honourable decay if such is possible. It was the custom in Israel at that time. Bless these women for their love and thoughtfulness.

But on the way they suddenly remember a very important detail; the stone that had been rolled in place and sealed in front of the tomb was very, very heavy. And so they muse: *Who will roll away the stone from the entrance of the tomb?* It is the only word they seem to utter on that quiet walk to the tomb:

Sorrow upon sorrow now; maybe they won't even be able to do the one last thing they could possibly do for Jesus. It's a pretty *dark walk* for them at that time of the day for more reasons than one. But almost numb with the emotional pain now, they continue on.

And then we come to those words that begin to change everything!

Verse 4: *But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled away!* I love that verse because it is the beginning of hope. It was a very special surprise. It's what is known as *serendipity* – the wonderful surprise of finding something even more wonderful than you have imagined as you are searching for something else – like discovering gold while you're digging for worms. Or like those four lepers in 2 Kings 7 who decided to risk their lives for food in the Aramean Camp only to discover that the whole army had fled and left everything behind.

Sometimes when we are upset the worst, something else happens – something that we can't explain apart from God's intervention. What a wonderful surprise began to unfold for these women! When they entered the tomb, this cavern of death, instead of seeing a body, they found a man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side of the tomb. And they were frightened.

The man spoke and told them that they shouldn't fear. The one they were looking for had risen from the dead and was no longer in the place of death. His body was gone! The man told them to go and spread the news to the disciples -- and Peter -- that he was risen! *He is going ahead of you into Galilee and there you will see him just as he said.*

And so the reality of what had happened began to slowly dawn upon them and the disciples. What had appeared to be the worst possible nightmare suddenly turned into the best news that anyone could ever have imagined! (As I said, the Gospel versions differ slightly on some details but slowly it becomes apparent to all of them that what the angel at the tomb was talking about had actually come to pass!)

What are the applications of all of this to our hearts this morning?

1. First and foremost, we can trust the truth of the Scriptures that Jesus *did* rise from the dead! It is that fact that makes our reason for being here today valid and important. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul writes, "*If Christ has not been raised your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. **If only in this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.***"

For me it is the truth of the resurrection that is the absolute foundation of my faith. Because of the way it is presented to us, we know we can trust the biblical record. Again and again in time of temptation and spiritual discouragement I come back to the fact that Jesus was raised from the dead. And if that's true (which I believe it is) that makes all the other claims of Jesus true as well – He was the Son of God, He did die for our sins, He is the only means by which anyone can experience eternal life.

2. It is this fact of the resurrection that fuels our mission and makes us want to participate in Christ's church despite all of the difficulties. Sometimes as we look at the church with all of its foibles and difficulties, all of its humanness, all of its faults, we can easily become rather discouraged about it all. Until we realize that the church is the most precious thing in the world to Jesus and to God. It is the apple of his eye. He is building his church everywhere and the *gates of hell shall not prevail against it*. It is moving forward like a mighty locomotive and nothing can stop its progress. The church is often messy and we may become discouraged, but Jesus loves the church and He is assured that it will prevail ...it will win! And He wants us to be assured of that as well.

We need to look often at the good things that are happening in the church. So often we get fixed upon the negative stuff and get bogged down by it. But if we will just lift our eyes, we will see that there are lots of good things happening. *Don't let the negative stuff get in the way of seeing the bigger picture.* Look around you here at Mountianview Alliance Church and see the good things that God has done over the years. Think of individual lives that have been touched by God through this work. Even now you can see some amazing evidences of God's work. I can see them – maybe better than you can because my mind isn't clouded by some of the negative things you may be thinking about.

3. And the last thing I want to say is that, like the women on the way to tomb, you may be very discouraged about a whole lot of things – either in your personal life or in the life of the church here. You may be a person who has lost all sense of hope but you are doing your best to be respectable and do what's right as you get ready to tend to what you think is dead. You may be carrying burial spices for the body. The furthest thing from your mind may be the possibility that anything good will come from this experience. Your only thought might be about how you're going to move the stone, how you're going to put one foot ahead of the next in order to go on.

Well this morning, because God is a God of hope, a God of the impossible, a God of the resurrection, I want to encourage you to look up like the women did and discovered that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled away. Look up. You might be surprised at what you'll see. Sometimes we've been looking down so long it's actually hard to look up. But so often, it's in looking up that we discover the beginning of change. It was when the women looked up that they began to experience change.

I want to encourage you to look up to the Lord today.

Psalm 121:1 *"I will lift up my eyes to the hills – where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord the maker of heaven and earth..."*

So many times in the Scriptures, in the very midst of overwhelming circumstances, God's people were asked to look up – to look to the Lord for their salvation and

their future. Think of Abraham and Isaac, Hagar and Ishmael, Moses and the people of God at the Red Sea.

In Luke 21:27-28, Jesus is speaking to the disciples about his coming again.

And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draws near.

So if you've been inclined to be discouraged consider the experience of those women on the path to the tomb. Consider the truth of the resurrection. Remember, God is in the business of bringing huge beautiful plants out of seemingly small dead seeds, and of bringing great things to pass out of the smallest seeds of faith. He is the resurrection and the life. In Zechariah 4:10, the word of the Lord came to the prophet asking the question: "*Who has despised the day of small things?*" So this morning God invites us to look up and see that the stone, which is very large, has been rolled away.