

**A Secret That Won't Go to the Grave**

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**Mark 16:1-8**

When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. <sup>2</sup> And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. <sup>3</sup> They had been saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?”

<sup>4</sup> When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. <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> But he said to them, “Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. <sup>7</sup> But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.” <sup>8</sup> So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

**WHO IS JESUS?**

When you tell a story, you often let the reader in on a secret. We, the readers know something that the people in the story don't know.

That creates dramatic tension and interest.

That's good story telling.

That's what Mark does in his gospel.

The very first line in his gospel tells us,

“The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” (Mark 1:1)

Jesus is the Christ, that is the Messiah.  
And he's the Son of God.  
We know from the very beginning.

But, the characters in the story...they don't know what we know.  
The message and ministry of Jesus will remain a mystery to them throughout the gospel of Mark.

The folks in Mark's story don't know who Jesus.  
But, they are given tantalizing clues.

### SPEAKS AND ACTS WITH AUTHORITY

First of all, Jesus speaks with authority.  
He says what only God can say.

Why...he even forgives sins.  
(The religious leaders think to themselves the first time he does this, "Who does this Jesus think he is...God? Only God can do that.")

There's a clue.

And Jesus backs up his claims by doing only what only God can do.

Heals the blind and the deaf.  
Helps the lame to walk.  
Casts out demons.  
Stuff like that.

Once when the disciples were in a storm,  
he even silenced the wind and the waves.

But, none of this helps the disciples believe in Jesus.  
Instead, they are confused.

After Jesus stills the storm they ask.  
"Who is this guy that he can command even the wind and the waves?"

They don't know.  
But, they also don't ask him any questions

...because they are afraid.

This is another theme that echoes throughout Mark's gospel, fear. The disciples, the crowds, the religious leaders...sometimes they're encouraged or angry at what Jesus has to say.

But, most often friend and foe alike are afraid.

There is something about Jesus that fills them with awe and anxiety at the same time.

## THE MYSTERY SPREADS AND DEEPENS

Jesus sternly warns those who have been healed.  
"Don't tell anyone."

But, practically no one obeys.  
Those healed go out and tell everyone.

And so Jesus' fame grows and the mystery deepens.  
Everywhere Jesus goes people have the same questions.

Who is this guy?  
Where does he get the power to heal the sick?

Why does he heal on the Sabbath?  
Why does he claim to have the authority to forgive sins?

Inquiring minds want to know.

Some hope that he's the Messiah.  
Others are afraid he might actually be the devil incarnate.

When Jesus comes to town, people are excited...and afraid. No one can predict what he will say or do next.

He truly was an "enigma wrapped in a mystery".

He speaks in parables.  
And many have a hard time understanding.  
Even Jesus' own disciples are often not sure what he's getting at.

## MIRACLES AND CONFLICT

But, Jesus continues to travel throughout the land ...  
healing the sick, casting out demons, and speaking in parables.

The response to Jesus varies.  
Sometimes people beg him to stay.  
Sometimes people beg him to leave.

He feeds 5000 with only five loaves of bread and two small fish. Later, he  
does it again.  
This time he feeds 4000 with seven loaves and a few small fish.

So, the crowds get even bigger.  
I guess if you feed them, they will come.  
People follow him wherever he goes  
...hoping just to touch the hem of his garment and be healed.

And as the crowds grow,  
so does Jesus' conflict with the religious and political leaders.

The blind see.  
The deaf hear.  
Even a Gentile filled with legions of demons is healed and comes to faith.

But, the religious and political leaders of Israel?

They're the ones that are really blind.  
They're the ones that are really deaf.  
They consistently reject Jesus,  
and their rejection intensifies as the story moves along.

Jesus is even rejected by the folks in his own home town.

Jesus could do miracles everywhere else.  
But, in Nazareth...not so much.  
Too little faith he said.

And the folks in Nazareth got so mad at Jesus that they even wanted to kill  
him... stone him and throw him off a cliff!

There was one miracle that Jesus was able to do at Nazareth.

He was able to walk right through the middle of the crowd and escape.

But, this rejection is an ominous foreshadowing of things to come.

The real demons in this story are religious demons, and they live close to home.

## CLUELESS DISCIPLES

Chapter 8 of Mark's gospel seems to be a turning point. Jesus asks the disciples directly.

Who do you say that I am?

And Peter replies, "You are the Messiah?"

Finally, the mystery is revealed.

The disciples can finally see the truth. Right?

Well, not exactly.

When Jesus starts to talk about a cross and a resurrection, Peter quickly throws up his hands and takes Jesus aside.

Peter has no clue what Jesus means when he talks about resurrection. But, he does know about the cross, and he wants no part of it.

And that's when Jesus refers to Peter as "Satan".

Peter goes from being the prize student to Satan in sixty seconds.

And the mystery deepens.

Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God.

But, apparently this means something quite different from what most people expect.

All of them, friend and foe, alike do not understand what is going on with Jesus.

Jesus takes a few disciples up a high mountain and tries to give them greater insight.

You may remember that we studied this story the week before the beginning our Lenten journey to the cross.

Peter, James and John saw Jesus high and lifted up.

They saw Moses and Elijah.

They heard the voice from heaven say,

“This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased. Listen to him.”

Did that work?

Not really.

Jesus told them not to tell about their mountaintop experience until after the resurrection.

And the disciples ask each other (but not Jesus),

“What’s all this resurrection talk?

What does it mean?”

At the foot of the mountain we find that the other disciples also still struggle to have faith.

They cannot heal a young boy, and instead they are embroiled in a great debate with some religious leaders.

Jesus is so frustrated with their lack of faith and misplaced priorities that he cries out,

“O unbelieving generation.

How long shall I be with you?

How long shall I put up with you?”

After this Jesus withdrew from the crowds and took some time to teach his disciples again.

In particular he told them once again about the cross and the resurrection.

And did that help?

Nope.

The Bible tells us that the disciples still did not understand what Jesus was talking about and were afraid to ask.

Instead, the disciples began to argue among themselves about who was the greatest.

We noted last week that James and John wanted to be on Jesus' right and left in glory. When the new administration was installed they wanted to have high ranking cabinet positions.

This made the other disciples really mad... because they didn't think to ask first.

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem the disciples and the crowd thought it was a victorious military parade. Only Jesus knew that he was riding on to die on a cross.

## THE WRONG FRAME

Why couldn't anyone understand what Jesus had to say? Why were they afraid to ask questions?

Because the message Jesus brought was not the message anyone expected to hear.

It didn't fit with their view of what it meant to be a Messiah. And it didn't fit with their view of life and death.

All of us look at life with a certain set of assumptions.  
George Layoff put it this way,

"People think in 'frames'... To be accepted, the truth must fit people's frame.

If facts do not fit the frame, the frame stays and the facts bounce off."

To put it another way, all of us have a unique set of "glasses" through which we see the world.

This can be helpful because it helps us organize and make sense of the world

...at least to a certain extent.

But, suppose something happens that does not fit our frame, our deeply held assumptions?

We won't see it unless we get a new pair of glasses.

In fact we may even get angry and afraid when these new facts come our way.

Here's an example from the past.

Galileo said that the earth revolved around the sun.

But, the prevailing view of the time was that the sun revolved around the earth.

This was so widely believed that it was even incorporated into the faith system of the Catholic Church.

And since this was the time of the Inquisition, Galileo was forced to modify his view under threat of torture.

Now, all of us have been taught from a very early age that the earth revolves around the sun.

When we look back on this, we say, "How could they have been so blind?"

But, remember, everyone believed that the sun revolved around the earth. They had believed it for centuries.

All the great scientists had promoted this view.

It would take many years before people could put on new glasses and see the solar system clearly. Until that time all of his arguments for a sun centered solar system were seen not only as wrong but in some quarters as heretical.

The same thing is going on in Mark's gospel.

As I mentioned before, we, the reader, are given a new pair of glasses in the very first verse.

Jesus is the Messiah.

And more than that, he is the Son of God.

This is gospel.  
This is good news.

This means that all the old rules no longer apply.  
We see that.

But, from the beginning to the end of Mark's gospel,  
no one in the story sees that, not really.

There are hints.

But, no one is sure.

## THE FRAME OF DEATH

So, in our lesson for today, Jesus' conflict with the political and religious leaders has finally led to a cross.

Jesus' message was just too radical.  
It messed up their frame too much.

So he was murdered by the very people he came to save.

Messiahs weren't supposed to die on a cross.  
Messiahs were supposed to bring in a new kingdom.

And so, if anyone had believed that Jesus was the Messiah, no one believed it any more.

That includes the women who came to anoint Jesus' body. They go to the tomb very early on the first day of the week... just as the sun rises.

What do the women expect?  
They expect to see a dead man.

They, like everyone else, look at Jesus through the lens of death and decay.  
Jesus has been crucified, dead and buried.

They are going to pay their last respects.

Nothing else left to do.

But, then they remember.

“There’s a large stone in front of the tomb.

It’s too big for us to handle.

Who will roll away the stone?”

And as soon as they ask that question,  
the sun comes up high on the horizon  
and the tomb comes into view.

And the stone...that very large stone?  
Already rolled away.

Didn’t see that one coming.

Nor were they prepared for what came next.

A young man dressed in a white robe sat on the right side of the tomb.

How did they react?

The NRSV translates, “They were alarmed.”

That’s way too weak a translation.

A better translation might be,

“They were struck with terror.”

They wanted to run away.

Right away.

It gets worse.

The young man in white tells them,

“No need to be terrified.

You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth,  
who was crucified.

He has been raised; he is not here.

Look, there is the place they laid him.

But go, tell his disciples and Peter  
that he is going ahead of you to Galilee;  
there you will see him, just as he told you.”

That should calm them down.  
Right?

Not so much.

## RUN AWAY AND TELL NO ONE

The women do not look at the place where they laid Jesus. Instead, they  
run away.

They are absolutely terrified.

And they don't follow the young man's directions either.

They don't tell the disciples that Jesus is going on ahead of them to Galilee.

They don't tell anyone anything.  
“They were so afraid...”

And with that the gospel of Mark ends in the middle of a sentence.

Think of it from their perspective.  
If you're coming to anoint a dead body,  
news of a living person doesn't fit the frame.

This is a totally unique event.

Yes, Jesus talked about his resurrection,  
but the disciples and no one else for that matter  
had the foggiest idea what he was talking about.

No wonder the women run away in fear and tell no one.

Who would have believed them anyway?

## THE FRAME OF RESURRECTION

Mark's story is not the only story we have when it comes to the resurrection.

There are appearances of the risen Christ in all the other gospels.

But, Mark ends his gospel in the middle of a sentence...with the women running away  
and telling no one what they saw...because they were terrified.

In some ways, Mark's way of telling the story  
better helps us understand the magnitude of the resurrection.

If Christ is raised,  
then the world has fundamentally changed.

The power of death no longer holds sway.  
And we will have to totally re-frame how we look at the world.

We are no longer the center of the universe.  
The Son (that's S-o-n) is the center of the universe.  
Everything that we thought we knew will have to be reevaluated.

We know that's gospel.  
We know that's good news.

Remember that Mark told us as much at the very beginning of his story.

But, I wonder.  
Could the story of the resurrection also be frightening news to us as well?

If we really hear and believe the message of resurrection, it will require us  
to change.  
And sometimes we just don't want to do that.

Believe it or not  
...we sometimes are more comfortable  
in a world where death and destruction have the final word.

## A SECRET THAT WON'T GO TO THE GRAVE

But, God in Christ has interrupted this cycle of death and destruction. What happened with Jesus is but the first fruits of things to come.

We know that the secret about Jesus' identity didn't go down with him down to the grave.

The grave couldn't hold that secret.

And once the secret got out.

Once the women finally were able to tell others what had happened, a lot of people had to rethink everything.

For the disciples, the world had been re-framed through the lens of resurrection.

And they saw everything differently through those spectacles.

That's why we're here today.

We have come to think about how our world looks different when we look at it through the lens of resurrection.

## NEW GLASSES

This past week I've been in the process of getting new glasses.

It's been several years. I'm getting older.

I need a slightly stronger prescription.

You know how that goes.

If we don't take the time to get new glasses, our view of the world can get pretty dim, and it'll happen so gradually, we won't even recognize it.

I think that those of us who follow Jesus need to re frame the way we look at the world from time to time. We need to get a new pair of glasses.

We need to take a new look at our lives through the lens of resurrection.

Sometimes our prescription has become too weak over time.

We remain captive to doubt.

We are ruled by our fears instead of our faith.

So what can we do?

What is the prescription for resurrection glasses?

In my experience, I've always found that music helps. For example, our anthem this morning is a rousing bluegrass hymn.

It invited us to imagine how the resurrection of Christ was just the beginning.

There's more to come for all of us.

Reflecting the words of the apostle Paul in his first letter to the Thessalonians we sang,

“On that resurrection morning when the trump of God shall sound,

We shall rise.

Hallelujah we shall rise.”

Sometimes words alone are not enough to convey the enormity of an event.

We need signs of a greater reality.

We need music that lifts us up.

That's why today's service is filled with all the bells, hymns and hallelujahs that we could muster.

Like Mark's gospel, the music points us heavenward, to something that is too wonderful to grasp.

Good news about life and life beyond life.

The tomb is empty.

Jesus goes on ahead of us.

And he'll meet us on the other side of Jordan.

Won't you sing hallelujah with us?

Dare to put on those resurrection glasses,  
and see a whole new world.

Amen.