Mark Lesson 52 (2023)

**THE EMPTY TOMB**

*(Subtitle: The Reality of Resurrection)*

Mark 16:1-20

Key Verse: 16:6

“‘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.’”

Good morning! Today, we journey into the heart of a profound truth – the reality of resurrection and what it means for our lives. While many of you may be familiar with the sermon in today’s passage, I encouraged you to momentarily imagine the scene: the stone rolled away, the empty tomb. (Pic#1) What do you perceive in this emptiness? It is not just a scene we read in today’s passage. It is a vibrant reality that intertwines with the depths of our daily existence. In our gathering today, we are not just a congregation; We are a community of individuals with stories, challenges, vulnerabilities, brokenness, and triumphs. Each of us carries a unique journey that interacts with the profound truth of resurrection.

Let me share a story with you. In a little town, there lived an older woman named Mrs. Thompson. She was known for her warm smile, but there was a lifetime of pain behind it. Mrs. Thompson had carried the heavy burden of a fractured relationship with her estranged sister, Sarah, for decades. One day, as Easter approached, Mrs. Thompson stumbled upon an old family photo album in her dusty attic. Flipping through its pages, she encountered memories of shared laughter, childhood adventures, and family gatherings. Yet, in the middle, there were missing pages, reflecting years of silence and separation. (Pic#2)

Prompted by an inner prompting, Mrs. Thompson took a courageous step. She reached out to her sister Sarah with a heartfelt letter, expressing a desire for reconciliation. Weeks passed, and just as East Sunday arrived, there was a knock on Mrs. Thompson’s door. It was Sarah. As the two sisters embraced, it was more than a reunion; it was a resurrection of a relationship believed to be long dead. (Pic#3) The years of bitterness, silence, and brokenness were transformed into a moment of forgiveness and grace. The tomb of their strained relationship was empty, giving way to a new beginning. Mrs. Thompson and Sarah repaired their relationship from that day onward, uncovering a deeper connection. This poignant story illustrates how the reality of resurrection interacts with our everyday life. Let’s explore together and find the profound beauty of resurrection in today’s passage.

Let’s turn to verses 1-3. “When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary, the mother of James, and Salome brought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus’ body. Very early in the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb, and they asked each other, ‘Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?’” The Sabbath ended at sundown Saturday evening, but these women did not come to the tomb until Sunday morning, the third day after his death on the cross. This time frame implies that Jesus’ body had been in the tomb for some time.

The women, who had observed Jesus’ death on the cross from a distance, came to the tomb early in the morning, not expecting to see the Risen Christ but to honor Jesus by anointing his body with spices. Their primary concern was removing the heavy stone that blocked the entrance to the tomb.

Look at verses 4 and 5. “But when they looked up, they saw that the huge stone had been rolled away. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.” While Mark does not mention explicitly who moved the heavy stone from the entrance, Matthew’s account records that there had been an earthquake, and an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and rolled back the stone and sat on it. (Mt. 28:2)

Now, the question arises: *“Why did the angel roll away the stone?”* Is it because Jesus needed to get out of the tomb? Maybe not because the Risen Jesus could pass through the walls and rocks, just as we see in John 20:26, that even though the door was locked, the Risen Jesus came in and stood among his disciples and said, *“Shalom! Peace be with you!”* (Pic#4) The stone was rolled aside so others could get in and see for themselves that Jesus had risen from the dead, just as he had predicted. (Mk. 8:31; 9:31).

However, the women approaching the tomb were unaware of Jesus’ resurrection. Their likely response might have been, “Who *rolled the stone away? It must have been someone very strong. But who did it?”* Seeing a young man wearing a white robe, they were alarmed, wondering who he was. Although Mark described the figure as a young man, it is understood to be an angel in a white robe, likely presented from the women’s perspective.

By the way, why was the angel present? Verse 6 provides insight. Look at verse 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.’” While no humans witnessed the Resurrection itself, the angels witnessed it as the constant observers of God’s action. The fact is that God sent the angel in a human form to relate the women and the actual event of Jesus’ resurrection.

How did the angel help these women? Firstly, the angel addressed their fear by saying, “Don’t be alarmed.” We might overlook the importance of helping these women manage the emotions of fear and anxiety. But considering their essential role in giving the message of Jesus’ resurrection, it was crucial. Emotional distress likely plagued these women, including Mary Magdalen, due to the recent crucifixion of Jesus. The discovery of the empty tomb and the angel’s message could have overwhelmed them, potentially inducing panic or confusion. Thus, calming them was vital to ensuring a clear reception of the message, preventing them from being paralyzed by fear or anxiety. After all, in the cultural and historical context, where women's testimony was sometimes questioned, this assurance strengthened the credibility of their witness to the empty tomb and the angel’s message. The initial response of the women at the tomb was fear and uncertainty. Fear often accompanies the unknown, and uncertainty can lead to anxiety. Managing these emotions is vital because recognizing and working with them allows individuals to fully acknowledge the depth of human experience and embrace the transformative message of new life in Christ.

Despite the women seeking the dead body of Jesus of Nazareth, the angel conveyed the message. Inviting the women to inspect the burial chamber and witness the space, the angel proclaimed, “He has risen! He is not there. See the place where they laid him.” According to the angel’s message, the crucified Jesus, buried but now alive, had risen to life. The tomb was empty. (Pic#5)

It’s worth noting that, unlike other Gospel writers who included additional details in the tomb, such as neatly folded burial clothes and strips wrapped around Jesus’ body, Mark uniquely focuses on the empty tomb as the primary evidence of Jesus’ resurrection. The question arises as to why he emphasized only the empty tomb.

What are the implications of the empty tomb? The implications of the empty tombs are significant. Firstly, it serves as a tangible indication of Jesus’ physical resurrection, affirming the belief that he conquered death, rose from the dead, and left the grave behind, aligning with prophecies in the Scriptures. Symbolically, the empty tomb represents the triumph of life over death, authenticating Jesus’ claims about his divinity, the power of life, and his predictions of his death and resurrection. It underscores that these claims were not mere words but had a profound reality. *“Jesus has risen from the dead!”*

Considering the reality of Jesus’ resurrection, Apostle Paul, though not witnessing the event, encountered the Risen Christ later in a transformative experience on the way to Damascus (Act 9:1-19). In his letter to the Corinthian Christians, he presented factual evidence of Jesus’ resurrection by citing eyewitnesses like Peter, the Twelve Apostles, James, and over five hundred believers who saw the Risen Christ simultaneously. He also emphasized the necessity and transformative impact of Christ’s resurrection on our lives. His testimony of the resurrection is undoubtedly convincing. (1 Cor.15:1-58)

However, I must admit that no testimony of eyewitnesses can ultimately convince everyone. Some people think the resurrection is no more than a myth or a concocted story. Understood! But suppose Jesus’ resurrection is nothing but a myth or artificial story. How could his fearful disciples be filled with the fullness of life and dedicate themselves to the gospel of Jesus, as we see in the book of Acts? After all, what could have changed Paul, a stubborn Jewish orthodox Pharisee who persecuted so many Christians, into a powerful witness of the Risen Christ? What happened to them? What touched or changed them was not a myth or man-made story. The resurrection of Jesus was not a myth but a display of the power of God.

Throughout history, the power of Jesus’ resurrection has touched numerous peoples’ lives. Their lives shifted from despair to hope, grief to joy, fear to confidence, hatred to love, and alienation to reconciliation. The empty tomb is not a myth but a reality of resurrection, possessing transformative power for those who believe.

Having said this, we need to remember that this transformation is not automatic. It requires intentional faith in Christ. In other words, we must not avoid death but face death by faith. What does it mean? It does not necessarily mean physical death but involves crucifying oneself and living in Christ Jesus, as expressed by Paul in Galatians 2:20: “I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” We need to practice the principle of eternal life, “To live is Christ, and to die is gain.” (Php. 1:21) This principle is simple but life-giving. Knowing is not enough; we must practice it.

Let’s examine verses 7-8. “But go, tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you,’ Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.” Although Jesus was raised to live in Jerusalem, he instructed the women to inform his disciples and Peter to go to Galilee to meet him. According to the angel’s message, the Risen Jesus wanted to meet his disciples in Galilee, where he started his ministry. Overwhelmed with fear, the women refrained from sharing the news with anyone. In the original manuscript of Mark’s gospel, verse 8 marks the actual conclusion. The empty tomb is the end of the story.

Some might wonder why verses 9-20 are written in Italics. This formatting is employed because, while the content in 16:1-8 is universally regarded as original to Mark’s manuscript, the section of 16:9-20 is widely considered inauthentic. Scholars generally believe it was added sometime in the second century or later.

Mark 16:9-20 often regarded as the *“Longer Ending.”* This section elaborates on the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus. Mary Magdalene initially encountered Jesus, facing skepticism from the grieving disciples. Two others reported seeing Jesus in a different form, yet doubt persisted among the disciples. Later, the Risen Jesus appeared to the eleven and rebuked their unbelief. He then commissioned them, instructing them to spread the gospel globally, baptizing believers, and performing miraculous signs. The passage concludes with Jesus’ ascension into heaven and the disciples faithfully carrying out their mission, confirmed by the Lord through accompanying signs.

Let us bring this sermon to a close. In Mark’s narrative, the empty tomb is not just a historical fact or a symbol but a powerful testament to the truth that Christ has conquered death. The empty tomb signifies victory. It represents a new beginning. In Christ, we share in the triumph over death. In the face of an uncertain world, the empty tomb is an enduring symbol, inspiring us to find safety and security in the Risen Jesus. Just as Jesus emerged from the tomb, conquering the grip of death, we are encouraged to step out of the grave of sin, hopelessness, and despair and move into a renewed life of liberation and hope.

This renewal is not merely a one-time event, but an ongoing journey characterized by God’s abundant love and grace through Christ Jesus, who suffered for our sins and rose from the dead. Jesus is not dead. He has risen! He is with us now and forever. But we who are saved by faith in Christ Jesus must continue to live by faith in Jesus by crucifying ourselves and being united with him. Through our faith in Christ, we can experience God's transforming and life-giving power in our lives.

The empty tomb is more than a symbol of triumph; it’s a perpetual reminder that, in Christ, we possess victory over the ultimate adversary- death itself. This victory extends beyond the present moment, assuring us of everlasting life in the here, now, and future. It offers a profound sense of security and victory that transcends the uncertainties of our earthly lives. What a wonderful and fantastic hope we have in Christ Jesus! This is the gospel we should share with others in words and deeds. As we navigate a world with many challenges, may the empty tomb remind us of God’s power and victory that can transform our lives. May we live by faith in Jesus and experience freedom, love, hope, forgiveness, reconciliation, and the fullness of life in our day-to-day living, both now and forever.