ReMarkable: The Un-ending (Mark 16) Memory Verse: Mark 16:6

April 20th, 2025 (Easter Morning) Scripture Reading: Mark 16

**[SLIDE 1]**

 Today is the day. We have made it! We have followed Mark from the beginning and heard his report all the way through to the end. We have witnessed all the miracles of Jesus: the healings, the exorcisms, even his power to control the wind and waves. We have seen Jesus contend with the Jewish leaders who were out to kill him for tampering with their way of life and their understanding of God. We have seen Jesus interact with Gentiles, bringing the reality of God’s kingdom even into their neck of the woods. Jesus has exuded authority over all things, and yet, at the same time, he has demonstrated compassion to people, young or old, rich or poor, hungry or fed, Gentile or Jew.

 Mark is clear about who Jesus is, but we have also seen what Jesus had to do. **[SLIDE 2]** And chapter 10 informs us, Jesus came to serve and to give his life to liberate many people. This giving of his life is a very literal reality. And the liberation he speaks of is very real as well. We saw Jesus unjustly arrested, falsely accused, injudiciously tried and unaccountably executed. An innocent man sent to the cross. God himself put under a curse. Many mocked him as he hung there, but some believed.

 Jesus dies relatively quickly. In only six hours he had breathed his last. And as he died, the curtain in the temple that had blocked off the presence of God from everything else was torn away! No longer would God be approached through a priest who served at the temple. Jesus would be our high priest. No longer would people have to come bearing animals to be slaughtered on the altar. Jesus was our sacrificial Lamb. No longer would we come to the temple to meet with God…now God would come to us and reside within our bodies of flesh and bone.

 But I am getting ahead of the story. **[SLIDE 3]** One thing we must notice is that Mark 16 is extremely short…only eight verses. Now, there is included a longer ending which we will talk about, but I want to be clear, as far as we can tell, we have Mark’s writing through verse 8. **[SLIDE 4]** Then we have a sort of addendum added later by an unknown author. I want to affirm that I believe this later addition is scripture in the sense that it does communicate God’s word to us, it’s not a bad thing that we have it in our bibles, but I also want to differentiate it from the gospel that Mark was writing. We should know that these last sections were not original to Mark. We will see why this is important in just a bit.

 Chapter 15 ends with a mention of the women **[SLIDE 5]** who were present to see where Jesus was buried. This was not the norm for people who were crucified. As we said at our Good Friday service, most criminals who were crucified were just left in a ditch. But Jesus was buried and these women wanted to pay homage and honor the body of their Lord by anointing him with spices. This would have been inappropriate to do on the Sabbath so they wait until daybreak the following day. As they come to the tomb, they realize that they may have had a bit of a flaw in their planning. They knew the tomb was covered by a massive stone. They knew they would not be able to budge it on their own. Mark even leaves a note in verse 4 commenting on the largeness of this stone. They begin to wonder who they might contact to help them deal with this blockade. I think Mark is implying here that there are still no disciples to be found. They fled in the garden, and Peter sort of hung around, but all he actually did was deny that he knew Jesus. ((According to Mark, the women were the ones present as Jesus was crucified and they stayed with him until the end, even after the end; long enough even to know where he was buried. Surely, they would have brought along a few able-bodied disciples to help them move a tombstone. They would have if they could have, but the disciples were apparently nowhere to be seen, or at the very least, unwilling to escort these women to the scene of the grave.

 I suppose the two Mary’s and Salome figured they would go to the tomb and give it their very best try. Maybe a strong wind at their backs would aid them in their efforts. And I can’t help but think of my own life here and all the times I have trudged on into something that surely will not work out. **[SLIDE 6]** Have you even done that before? This happens in ministry all the time. As a church we march forward to accomplish tasks that we are not really able to achieve. And we make our plans just fine. We purchase the spices we need, we set a time and place, we get together and share the responsibility but often on the way to do the thing, we realize this just isn’t going to work. There are blockades in the way that we cannot overcome. **[SLIDE 7]** There are tombstones that we just cannot move. Things like the busyness of people’s schedules. I can’t force people to make time for church. It’s stone in the way. Maybe the people I talk to are just not interested in what church offers them. It’s a stone in the way. Maybe people have been wounded by a church in the past. Another stone. But despite these obstacles, our desire is there. Just like these women, we want to honor the Lord **[SLIDE 8]**. We want to show him that we love him. We know what the obstacles are, but we make our preparations, and we move forward all the same.))

 This is how the life of a disciple unfolds. Think back to Mark chapter six. **[SLIDE 9]** Jeus sends out his disciples to share the message of the good news of God’s kingdom, but he also gives them the power to expel demons and heal the sick…and they do it! They cannot do it, they are unable to do it, and yet, they are made able through the **[SLIDE 10]** authority and power of Jesus.

 We are no different. We feel different. We feel much more removed from this story. After all, thousands of years have passed and much has changed. It is easier for us to think of Jesus as a concept, a hero from history, rather than the living Son of God who walks with us and talks with us and sends us still today to preach, to heal, to do impossible things. It’s the same Jesus.

 Take the example of the single action of **[SLIDE 11]** sharing your faith with an acquaintance, someone you know. Let’s say you have plans to meet up with this person at a local coffee shop just to catch up and visit. If you know this person is not a Christian, you might prepare ahead of time, get your spices together so to speak. Maybe you pull a few bible verses or brush up on a personal story that helps make your point. Maybe you take a few powerful quotes from last week’s sermon, or from a book you’ve read. Once you are ready, you hop in the car and drive to the coffee shop. But on the way it dawns on you…you are heading straight to an immovable obstacle… **[SLIDE 12]** the human heart. You realize there is nothing you can do or say to change someone else’s heart. Faith is not a debatable point, and believing in Jesus is not the result of winning an argument. Yet, you are called to speak about the hope that you have. You are called to shine your light. So, you continue on your journey just as these women did…And you think and pray: “I don’t know how the obstacles will be removed, I will just go and I will do my best. **[SLIDE 13]** I am prepared, I am ready, and I know I won’t be able to get all the way through to the heart of the matter, but I will go nonetheless. Maybe someone will come and help me, maybe God will intervene, maybe the obstacle has been removed. I don’t know, but I will go.

 So the women go, **[SLIDE 14]** knowing their way was blocked, but low and behold, once they arrive, the stone is gone! They can get access, and they can accomplish what they had hoped! As they approach, they realize that they are not alone. **[SLIDE 15]** A young man is sitting inside the tomb apparently waiting for them. He is dressed all in white and he reassures them that they need not be afraid. Jesus has risen. He is not here as you can see. Now, go tell his disciples. Tell them that they should meet up with him in Galilee. And Mark’s final verse reads: **[SLIDE 16]** “Overcome with terror and dread, they fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.” The End. That is the end! Remember, Mark is not a novelist, he is a reporter….he is relaying the facts.

 The fact is, we are attending church right now. **[SLIDE 17]** The fact is the church was shortly born after these events. The fact is all the fearful disciples found their courage because something miraculous happened on that Sunday morning. The Christian church exists today because Easter morning is an undeniable, historical fact. Jesus rose and we, as a church, are proof of it! Everyone who reads Mark’s gospel knows that the story does not just end with fearful women running from the tomb. That is not how the story ends, but I firmly believe that Mark intended to leave his gospel hanging. **[SLIDE 18]** He ends with an un-ending on purpose. All along, he has shown us that we, as modern-day disciples, are intimately connected to the original twelve. We are confused like they are, we are scared like they are, we misunderstand like they do. But, even through the confusion and the fear, they sometimes get it right. Mark’s message is clear, we sometimes get it right too. We are disciples. We live in a different time and a different place, but we follow the same Savior and bear the same call, “Go!”

Imagine if you will, for a moment, that we could close the gap of time. And imagine that you are there that morning. **[SLIDE 19]** You are standing looking at the tomb in the distance, and you notice a large stone rolled to the side, and as you stand there, you observe three woman curiously approach and cautiously enter the open tomb. After a few beats, you see those same women running away terrified. You can faintly hear their screams. But from this chaotic scene you notice a ball slowly rolling towards you, but not just in your direction, by directly to you! It goes up and down the rocky terrain, it presses down the long grass until it stops at your feet. You realize in that moment, “This ball has come to me…it is mine to pick up. This story is mine to take to the nations. The responsibility for telling this story has fallen to me. I am the one who must go and tell. I am the one who knows what has happened to Jesus. I, the reader of Mark, have been pointed to, I have been handed the baton. The ball is in my court. Do I pass it by? Do I walk away? Or do I pick it up and join as a disciple of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Savoir of the world? All along Mark has tied us to the disciples. **[SLIDE 20]** We share the same Lord and same calling. And here with his final verse Mark lays the job at my feet and at your feet. He points at us. He is saying, “You. You are the one. You know the story. I just reported it to you. You know who this Jesus is. You know what happened to him. Theis story cannot be entrusted to these terrified women and it certainly can’t be left to the disciples who are nowhere to be found. The job has fallen to you. You go and tell it.”

 But we are afraid, we hesitate. And Mark assures us, “Of course you are afraid. Read what I wrote again. All the disciples were afraid, the women were afraid. For good reason, it’s dangerous work, especially for my original readers. Who knows what Rome might do to you if you keep spreading the story of Jesus. But that’s what happens when you pick up that ball, you have to lay down your own life first.”

 **[SLIDE 21]** So when we do find ourselves heading to meet with someone who does not know the story of Jesus, who does not know who Jesus is, will we flee from the situation in fear or will we take a deep breath, pick up the ball and at the risk of everything tell others about this Jesus?

 Someone later thought that Mark’s un-ending ought to be cleaned up. **[SLIDE 22]** So they tacked on another verse that for all intents and purposes refutes Mark’s original ending. Here the women did go and tell and from there the disciples did preach far and wide the undying message of eternal salvation. Certainly, the women did eventually tell someone. It came to pass that somehow the empty tomb was found and the disciples did come to believe in what had really happened and they did share it with the world. But this added ending keeps the story stuck in history. This is what happened, and they told others what happened. It even ends with a clean, “Amen”. In this ending, the disciples take care of it. They do the sharing. I think Mark wanted us to know that we are to do the sharing. We are to take upon ourselves the role of a **[SLIDE 23]** disciple. We are the ones who are sent out from east to west with the sacred and undying message of eternal salvation!

 But adding one verse to the end was not enough. There were still too many details left out. You can’t have the main hero die and then rise and then never see him again! So this ending includes three separate times in which the risen Jesus appears to people. Once to Mary Magdalene, once to the two people walking along a country road and once to the rest of the disciples. Jesus is not happy with their hesitancy to believe. He gives them the same mandate, **[SLIDE 24]** “Go into the whole world and proclaim the good news to every creature.” He then gives some signs, some indications that these disciples go with his authority. They are ambassadors of his Kingdom and as such they will be able to cast our demons and administer healing. They will not be harmed by venom or poison. And verse 20 tells us that they did so. “They went out and proclaimed the message everywhere.”

 This is our mandate. This is our call as disciples. The ball is in our court. It’s right there laying at our feet. Over the past few months, our church leadership team has talked a lot about this dynamic. We have been trying hard to figure out how we can go out as a church. Most of what a church does is invite people to come. And if people come they can benefit from a good church service with scripture and music and a sermon. They can come on Wednesdays and get a meal, they can join up with a grow group. We do a good job proclaiming the message of Jesus here, in these doors. And people will hear the message loud and clear *if* they come.

 But the call of Christ is not that we invite people to come to us. We are to go to them. See, an invitation is not a bad thing. We need to invite people to church, that is a crucial component of the life of any church, but an invitation puts the ball into the other person’s court. They have been invited and now they have to decide what to do with that ball. All too often we leave the ball with them and we never actually get to the proclaiming part. Remember, the work is impossible. It only leads us to a giant stone that we cannot move. But we do not work alone! The resurrected Christ goes with us. It is his power that sends stones rolling. It is his power that opens deaf ears, his power that softens hard hearts. His power that casts out demons and brings healing. We do the work in his power.

 Mark’s gospel does not end on purpose. The next chapter begins with you! Again, verse 8: “Overcome with terror and dread, the women fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone because they were afraid.” **[SLIDE 25]** And now the ball has come to you. Pick it up. Risk it all. Go and tell. Christ is risen! Amen. `