

Introduction

- † Image/Need: Jeff, was the best public speaker I had ever heard. Witty, exciting, he made the scriptures come alive. His teaching inspired as much enthusiasm as the musical worship.
- People grew quickly under his teaching, and the church was known for evangelism, service, and community. In ten years under Jeff, the church had grown to 650 enthusiastic people. Then one day... Jeff disappeared.
- † If you had been a member of that church, how would you have reacted?
- For the people who were young in their faith, this was a test of that faith. Jeff had led them to the gospel, and they were still dependent on him to guide them into the things of God. Across the church, there was widespread confusion, shock, and disillusionment.
 - Even for more mature believers, this was a test – not of our faith – but of our commitment to that church. All I wanted to do was run away until I could figure out what was going on.
- † If you had been me, how would you have reacted? If you can imagine how hard this was for me and my church, then you empathize with the first disciples of Jesus when their leader was killed.
- They wanted him to be king, they saw him as the promised deliverer from God, but now the Roman government and their own religious authorities had crucified him.
 - Think of how disillusioned they must have been; think of how frightening it would be to know that the authorities had just killed the leader of your group, and now might be coming after you.
- † If you had been following Jesus and now he was dead, how would you have reacted?
- Imagine as you were in the midst of this, you heard a strange story of a resurrection. How would you react to that? Could you push aside your fear and bewilderment to accept this news with joy? or would this just further confuse you?
- † Today we might no longer be confused by the crucifixion, and we anticipate the news of the resurrection on the next page, but we often find that our reactions are similar to those of the original disciples.
- Most of those disciples reacted to these events in the wrong way... what if we do too? Is it possible that your reaction to the resurrection is wrong, not pleasing to God? Wouldn't that be tragic? Of all the stories in the Bible, surely we want to react correctly to the resurrection of Christ.
- † Subject/Text/Preview: Let's find out if we are. Let's take a look at Mark 15.40-16.8; we'll do a self assessment and – based on what Jesus reveals about himself in the story and how his followers react to that revelation – we will discern three commitments Mark wants us to make as we react to the news of the resurrection.
- In Mark 15.40-16.8, we will see how Mark brings his story to an exciting end. In 15.40-16.8, Mark will deliver to us three surprises: a surprising role model, a surprising revelation, and a surprising conclusion. And from these, we will discern the three commitments Mark wants us to make as we react to the news of the resurrection.

I. First, Mark gives us a surprising role model, who will do what is right, no matter what the risk. As we have seen, Mark loves irony, and he cannot resist showing us that one of the people we would least expect to do the right thing by Jesus will step forward to do so, even at great risk to himself. Like this man, we too must commit to do what is right, no matter what the risk.

- † You will recall from last week that Jesus has just died on the cross, and the centurion has declared him to be the son of God. We pick up the story in Mark 15.40: ⁴⁰ There were also women, watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. ⁴¹ When he was in Galilee, they had followed him and given him support. Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were there too.

- † In fear and confusion, almost all the disciples have run off. Even though Jesus predicted his own death and resurrection, his followers are disheartened and fearful.
- † These women watched Jesus' crucifixion from a distance. They were braver than the rest of the disciples, but even so they were at a distance.
 - This is the first mention of Mary Magdalene by name in Mark; we know from Luke that Jesus had delivered her of seven demons.
 - Mary the mother of James and Joses might be Mary the mother of Jesus because Mark names the brothers of Jesus, including James and Joses, but it might be a different woman altogether.
 - This is the only mention of Salome by name in Bible, but Matthew indicated she was the mother of the apostles John and James.
- † These were women who had been with Jesus for a long time and were active in his ministry.
 - They had followed him loyally as they served him and his apostles.
 - They had been exposed to Jesus' teaching about his kingdom, the need for his death, and his resurrection.
- † We continue in v.42: ⁴² Now when evening had already come, since it was the day of preparation (that is, the day before the Sabbath), ⁴³ Joseph of Arimathea, a highly regarded member of the council, who was himself looking forward to the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. ⁴⁴ Pilate was surprised that he was already dead. He called the centurion and asked him if he had been dead for some time. ⁴⁵ When Pilate was informed by the centurion, he gave the body to Joseph. ⁴⁶ After Joseph bought a linen cloth and took down the body, he wrapped it in the linen and placed it in a tomb cut out of the rock. Then he rolled a stone across the entrance of the tomb.
- † Mark is using a literary technique of sandwiching a key point. He started talking about the women and will finish with them, but in between he sandwiches this little bit about Joseph, so we will know it is important.
- † Here is a man who is a member of the Sanhedrin – the council that falsely convicted Jesus and stirred up a crowd to demand his crucifixion – and he now comes forward to care for Jesus' body.
 - This is ironic! This is not an apostles, but a member of the Sanhedrin!
 - Earlier Mark said “all” the council condemned Jesus; either Joseph was absent or Mark was using hyperbole to refer to the overwhelming majority vote with no vocal dissention.
- † That Joseph was waiting for the kingdom suggests he was a disciple of Jesus:
 - In Mark, Jesus began his ministry by announcing the kingdom in v.1.15, and he taught often on the kingdom throughout this Gospel history.
 - Matthew and John both identified this man as a disciple of Jesus.
- † Mark wrote that Joseph “boldly” went to Pilate and asked for the body: he was risking his reputation, position, maybe even his life.
 - He was a highly regarded member of the council: so surely at least he risked that regard from those who were against Jesus. John said he was a secret disciple of Jesus because he feared the Jewish religious leaders.
 - He also was going before the Roman ruler and asking for the body of a condemned criminal.
- † Now it is important for us to realize and remember that Jesus really did die on the cross!
 - Pilate got two witnesses to Jesus' death: Joseph's and the centurion's.
 - This fulfilled a Jewish legal criterion.
 - There are no known survivors of Roman crucifixion, out of hundreds of thousands killed that way.
 - The word Mark used for “body” – the Greek τὸ πτώμα – is used in the NT only to refer to a corpse.

- † Joseph wrapped the body of Jesus in linen, which was customary. Mark does not mention spices to anoint the body and cover the smell of decay as would be customary, but John says Nicodemus helped Joseph and carried the spices.
- † These events took place that same evening after Jesus died, before the sun went down to start the Sabbath. It was important for them to finish with the body before the Sabbath started.
 - The Law commanded Jews to bury their dead on the same day as the person died.
 - The Romans would sometimes leave crucified criminals to decay on the cross as a warning, but sometimes were given to relatives or friends for proper burial, which was important to Jews [Deut 21.23].
- † Matthew says Joseph used his own new tomb, which he had cut out of rock; this is another significant identification with Jesus; Luke says nobody had yet been buried in it.
 - About 1000 such tombs have been discovered around Jerusalem. Usually, the body was placed on one of several shelves, then when the flesh had decomposed, the bones were removed to an ossuary dug out below the shelves, and the shelves were thus reusable.
 - The stone would have been a huge disc, about as tall as a man, which rolled in a channel; it would have weighed hundreds of pounds, requiring more than one strong man to move. This kept out animals, kept in the smells of decay, and deterred grave robbers.
- † There is no indication in the text that Joseph understood the teachings of Jesus any better than any of the other disciples. Yet, when Jesus was crucified and almost all the disciples ran away, Joseph chose to risk everything he valued in this life to do what he thought was right by honoring Jesus with a proper burial.
 - This is how God wants us to react: we might not always understand God's plan or the circumstances he brings to us, but we can continue to boldly walk in faith – to do what is right no matter what the risk – just like Joseph did. Our first commitment is to do what is right no matter what the risk.

II. Mark gave us a surprising role model, next he will give us a surprising revelation: Jesus is raised from the dead! We know from earlier in the story that Jesus predicted his own death and resurrection, but none of his followers seemed to understand this teaching. They were surprised when Jesus died on the cross. Now, in a climactic scene, some of his followers learn the surprising revelation of Jesus' resurrection. And like those who learned of it back then, we must commit to believe in Jesus' resurrection from the dead.

- † We pick up the story in v.47: ⁴⁷ Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James saw where the body was placed. ^{16:1} When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought aromatic spices so that they might go and anoint him. ² And very early on the first day of the week, at sunrise, they went to the tomb. ³ They had been asking each other, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" ⁴ But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled back. ⁵ Then as they went into the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. ⁶ But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed. You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has been raised! He is not here. Look, there is the place where they laid him..."
- † At least two of the women mentioned earlier saw where Joseph buried Jesus.
- † At sunrise on the day after the Sabbath – Sunday morning – they brought spices to the tomb for the body.
 - This would be myrrh and aloes; if they saw Nicodemus' spices, it did not deter them from bringing their own.
 - This was an act of devotion by these women; they were trying to be dutiful as Jesus had taught them.
- † They were concerned about how to get into the tomb, because of the large stone.
 - This indicates they had no help from the male disciples, whom John indicates were hiding.
 - But to their surprise, the stone was rolled back from the entrance.
- † Inside, they found a what appeared to be a man, but surely was an angel, and this frightened them:
 - The white robe, "young man," and response of the women all indicate an angelic encounter.

- The verb translated as “alarmed” is the same as used to describe Jesus’ distress [14.33] in the garden of Gethsemane; it can mean excited, alarmed, overwhelmed, distressed...
- † In Mark, the term “looking for” occurs ten times, always in a context suggesting people were imposing constraints on Jesus, so this can be taken as a mild rebuke: they should not be looking in the tomb for the one who was raised.
 - Again we find irony, for they brought spices to obscure the effects of the tragic death, but Jesus is no longer dead;
 - And it is ironic that the living are occupied with death while the crucified one is not in the grave!
- † The angel told them Jesus was raised from the dead by God!
 - The crucified Jesus was also the resurrected Jesus: no body, an empty grave.
 - Defeat is translated into victory as the Son of God is revealed to suffer yet be raised to victory over death.
 - Mark brings to a close several theological themes that permeate his gospel: the mission of Jesus as the suffering servant of God, the identity of Jesus as the Son of God, the authority of Jesus even over death.
 - In Mark 8.35, Jesus said, “For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and for the gospel will save it.” Jesus lost his life to save our eternal lives.
 - The cross and resurrection are pivotal to the history of God with man.
- † Jesus really died on the cross and really was buried in a tomb, but Jesus also really was raised from the dead!
 - This is tremendously important! As Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15.14 [NET], “And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is futile and your faith is empty.” Our second commitment is to believe in Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. We can do this... Our second commitment is to believe in Jesus’ resurrection from the dead.

III. We have had a surprising role model and a surprising revelation. Last, Mark gives us a surprising conclusion: rather than a happy ending, we find the disciples still afraid and bewildered. This shocking ending provokes us to think how they should have reacted, and how we should react: how we must commit to joyfully share the good news of the resurrection.

- † In the last two lines, 16.7-8, the angel is still talking to the women: ⁷ “But go, tell his disciples, even Peter, that he is going ahead of you into Galilee. You will see him there, just as he told you.” ⁸ Then they went out and ran from the tomb, for terror and bewilderment had seized them. And they said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.
- † He commanded them to go tell the other disciples – even Peter who had denied Jesus – to go to Galilee to meet Jesus.
 - This fulfills the promise in 14.28: they all abandoned Jesus, but he would not abandon them, just as he promised. The angel reminded them that Jesus had taught them this would happen.
 - Today, we remain hopeful that God will complete his plans for the church and gospel mission, despite all our human failures.
- † However, their initial reaction was of fear and bewilderment and thus disobedience.
 - Mark shows us five negative responses of the women: they ran from the tomb; they were seized by terror; they were seized by bewilderment; they said nothing to anyone; and they were afraid.
 - Instead of reacting with joy and awe to the greatest miracle, they reacted with fear inhibiting their walk by faith. They fled, the same verb as used of the disciples in 14.50 when Jesus was arrested.
- † They were faithful followers of Jesus, but – because of their preconceived notions – they did not understand his teaching on his death and resurrection, just as was true for the apostles [see 8.33 for Peter].
 - Here we have another irony: in the beginning of Mark, Jesus commanded silence and people spoke; now the angel commands the women to speak and they are silent.
 - Again, we would expect the faithful women to respond in joy but they respond in fear; we would expect a member of Sanhedrin to hate Jesus, but Joseph is dutiful.
- † Why did Mark end his story like this?

- Even in Mark, there is the indication that the real story does not end here: that Jesus did appear to the disciples in Galilee, and so we know the women must have rallied to share their startling news with the others.
 - We see this is so from the other gospel accounts.
- † Throughout this gospel, Mark showed us how Jesus revealed who he was, and how people reacted.
- Here we have a contrast in our characters: all were faithful believers in God and followers of Jesus; all were good people trying to do what was right; the difference is in how they reacted to the new revelation of Jesus' death and resurrection: courage or fear; living out your faith or hiding in bewilderment.
 - And once again we see in Mark that it is not proximity or sight of Jesus that helps people understand, it is divine insight. The sign of the resurrection by itself did not inspire faith; it is the Holy Spirit using the gospel which inspires faith.
- † The ending of Mark anticipates a response from the readers to God's unexpected, unusual, and powerful work, another theme in Mark.
- The original readers likely were Roman believers suffering persecution from Nero.
 - How would you have reacted? What would you have done? We might ask, what are you doing? Are you joyfully sharing the good news? Or are you hiding your beliefs in fear and bewilderment? Or are you apathetic, standing at the empty tomb and shrugging your shoulders as though it is not of great importance?
 - Our third commitment is to joyfully share the good news of the resurrection.

Conclusion

- † From our surprising role model, we perceive that we must do what is right no matter what the risk.
- † From the surprising revelation, we perceive that we must believe in Jesus' resurrection from the dead.
- † From the surprising ending of Mark, we perceive that we must joyfully share the good news of the resurrection.
- † Putting it all together, I exhort you to believe in, and joyfully share, the good news of Jesus' resurrection, no matter what the risk.