

Sermon Transcript from March 27th, 2016
The Grave (of the Crucified & Risen Christ)
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So, I'm going to be reading from Mark's Gospel and his account of what went on during this resurrection, this day that we celebrate on Easter Sunday. It says this in Mark 16:1: **"When the Sabbath was over,"** – Sabbath is on Saturday – **"Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body."**

So, this day started with – by the way, if you're new to the story, at this point in the story, Jesus is dead. So, that's kind of important to know at this point in the story. So, Jesus is dead. He was crucified on the previous Friday. The two Marys and Salome were followers of Jesus who witnessed Jesus being killed and being hung on a cross which was a Roman torture and execution style called crucifixion. These women, and the disciples as well, saw Jesus on the cross. They heard Jesus breathe His last. They heard Him declared dead by the Roman executioners.

They would actually take a spear and thrust it through His heart to make sure that Jesus was all the way dead on the cross. And they pulled it out and He was dead. And then a man, after Jesus died, He died on Friday, after He died a man named Joseph of Arimathea went and asked if He could take Jesus' body down because it was about to go into Sabbath which was sundown on Friday night going into Saturday.

So, Joseph was like, "Hey, we can't leave His body there throughout the Sabbath. Let me take it down from the cross."

So he did and Jesus was taken down from the cross on Friday and they wrapped His body in linen and they put Him in a tomb, they buried Him or they placed Him in a tomb. And Sabbath then started. And Jesus body was brought into the tomb at sundown on Friday. At sundown on Friday, you entered into this thing that's called the Sabbath where the Jews did no work. So, the followers of Jesus couldn't do anything with Jesus' body. They loved, I mean, they really loved Jesus. They followed Him. And these women wanted to anoint His body with spices. But, they couldn't do it on Saturday because Saturday's the Sabbath. You can't do any work then. You can't go to a grave on Saturday. So, they had to wait.

So, Saturday, which was yesterday, they wait and they wait and they wait. And there was no work to be done. Then, early on Sunday morning, Sunday morning arrives. And while it's still dark, Mary and Mary and Salome, who were really dear friends of Jesus, went to anoint Jesus' body.

First of all, let me just say this is like really heavy and depressing right away. The story gets better, by the way, if you didn't know. It gets better than this. But, this is like the context of Easter morning. It's sad, it's dark. They're going to grab Jesus' body and anoint His body because that's what you did to people that you loved. Notice that they didn't skip to the tomb. They didn't like wake up on Sunday morning and the women were like, "Oh my gosh. Guys. You know what today is? Today is the third day. The day He's going to raise from the dead. Guys, let's go to the tomb, let's go see Jesus. He's back. Let's see Him."

They woke up on Sunday morning to see Jesus dead. Now, you may think that Christians believe that Jesus rose from the dead metaphorically. Like, "Oh, yeah. They say that. It's a metaphor they use. Kind of like when you say, 'What doesn't kill you makes you stronger,' or something like that."

We don't believe that Jesus rose from the dead metaphorically. We believe that Jesus rose from the dead literally. And, if you were to say, "Well, that doesn't really jive with how the world works because, the way the world works, dead people stay dead."

And I would say "Yes." I would agree with you. And these women would agree with you as well. These women weren't going to the tomb going, "Oh my gosh. Today's the day that Jesus is going to raise from the dead."

They went to the tomb going, "Jesus is dead."

They were expecting to visit a corpse. They were expecting to visit a dead body because Jesus died. He was in the tomb and dead people stay dead and they knew that. We can't be guilty of snobbery and think that we know more than they did. Like, "We know now. We have the internet. We know that dead people stay dead."

Like, dead people stay dead in the first century too. They were going to the tomb to visit a dead body because that's what you did to bodies of the ones that you loved. Anointing a dead body was one of the ways you endeavored to find closure with that life. Like a funeral almost. And you would endeavor to find closure by anointing the body. It was an act of devotion; it was an act of love. They loved Jesus. They were His friends. So, they went to anoint His body.

No one, not even the followers of Jesus, expected a resurrection here. No one did. Because they live in the same world we do that dead people stay dead. And so it says in verse 2, **"Very early on the first day of the week, just after the sun had risen, they were on their way to the tomb and they asked each other,"**

They're so full of emotion that they don't think of practical things. Like, "Oh, who's going to roll away the stone?"

Like, there's a giant stone on the entrance. Now, I don't have time to get into this today, but Mark, the way that Mark writes the book of Mark, he's a narrative genius as a writer. He is so good. I don't know if you caught what he did there. What he said is that on the first day of the week, which is Sunday, just after the sun had risen. Did you see what he did there? The last prophecy in the Old Testament, the very last prophecy in the Old Testament was a prophecy about how the sun of righteousness would rise, it says in Malachi.

"But for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness shall rise..." – not "s-o-n," but "s-u-n."

"The sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings."

And what Mark does here is he's not like s-o-n of God. No. He's alluding to this right here. This is like the very first Easter egg in storytelling. Right here. Mark's like, "Do you remember the Old Testament?"

And you're like, "Yeah!"

And he's like, "Well, then you know what I did there."

You would've seen this. Like, "Oh my gosh. This is what he's saying."

But, he's not writing a legend here. Mark isn't writing fiction. Mark actually gives eyewitness accounts of what's going on. He says, "There's a guy named Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the Jewish Council. He took courage and he asked Pilot, 'Can I have Jesus' body from the cross,' and then he buried Him in a tomb."

The names of the women that go to the tomb are named three different times, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome, as if to say this. This is what Mark is saying. As if to say that all of these people are eyewitnesses and, if you don't believe me, go ask them. They would have still been around when Mark's letter was circulating. Like, these were eyewitnesses of this event. It's not a legend. This is not fairytale. This is actually happening.

Then in Mark 16:4, it says, **"But when they looked up,"**

So, the women go to the tomb and then they looked up and they're like, "Who's going to roll away the stone? Oh my gosh. We didn't think about that."

"They saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away."

Yay. This is awesome. Yes. Is someone already in there? What's going on here?

"As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe..." – when you see that, read "angel." They saw an angel – **"...sitting on the right side..."** – what a strange detail. Like, "And he was on the right side. Not the left, but the right. Not the middle. He was on the right side."

"and they were alarmed."

Now, first off, this is the best job ever as an angel. Can you imagine getting this call?

Like, "Umm, okay. I need you to go and use your muscly angel arms to remove the stone and sit in Jesus tomb and wait for the women to arrive."

Like, that's a good job. Right? And you're there and I don't know what you are doing when you're waiting. You're like rehearsing. "What am I going to say? Sup? Or I've been waiting for you! I've been waiting for you. Is that creepy? Is that a little creepy?"

Like, that's a good job. And what Mark does is he points out here, he describes him as a young man. So, this is maybe a new angel on the job? This is fresh out of angel internship. This is like a really young angel. And the women come in and they're alarmed. And that word means that they're full of dread and wonder. So, they walk in and the angel's like, "Uh..."

And they're like, "Ah!"

And he's like, "Okay. Don't fear."

Now, this is what the angel says. And what the angel says is the bulk of what I want to talk about this morning. This is what the angel says.

"Don't be alarmed," – don't be dreadful and full of wonder. I know what you're thinking. Don't. Don't. – "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. 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.'"

I want to point out a couple of things. First, look at what this angel says about Jesus. He says, "You're here and you're looking for Jesus who was crucified. You're looking for Jesus who was crucified. You are looking for the crucified one."

Crucifixion, in the first century, was a horrific way to die. It was a method of torture and death invented by the Romans that was so excruciating that the word excruciating literally means "pain from the cross" or "from the cross."

Crucifixion was so dehumanizing that Roman citizens were not even allowed to be crucified. The Roman philosopher, Cicero, said this about crucifixion:

"To bind a Roman citizen is a crime, to flog him is an abomination, to kill him is almost an act of murder, to crucify him is what? There is no fitting word that can possibly describe so horrible a deed."

He went on to say that the very word "cross" should be far removed from not only the person of a Roman citizen, but from his thoughts, his eyes and his ears. Crucifixion was something that philosophers believe that a civilized Roman person shouldn't even witness or even talk about. Crucifixion was that horrendous. It was that bloody. It was that humiliating. Anyone in the first century who witnessed a crucifixion would've considered the person crucified cursed by God or, if they were Roman or Greek, they would have considered them cursed by "the gods."

So, anyone who was crucified was considered cursed by God or the gods. So, if you were Jewish for example, and you saw someone being crucified, you would have this – this was in their literature in the Old Testament.

Deuteronomy 21, **"If someone has committed a crime worthy of death and is executed and hung on a tree, the body must not remain hanging from the tree overnight. You must bury the body the same day, for anyone who is hung is cursed in the sight of God."**

And so, if you were Jewish and witnessing a crucifixion, you would've looked at that person as cursed by God. If you were a Gentile or, that is, you were a non-Jew at that time, you considered anyone who was crucified cursed by the gods. And you had no hope of an afterlife. Anyone who was crucified had no hope of an afterlife. If you were crucified, you died under the disfavor of the gods. There was no hope for you in this life or the next.

So, no matter who you are in the first century, Jew or Gentile, if someone died by crucifixion, it would've been like someone dying today by capital punishment for being

like a pedophile and a rapist and a racist and a terrorist and someone who bred dogs to kill people or something. Like, that person, if they were punished, they would die and we would consider them cursed by our society. We don't collectively necessarily believe in God, but we would consider them cursed by society.

This is how Jesus died. He died cursed. So my question is: what makes good Friday good? Why did we, as we started, we start singing all these songs. And I don't know if you're new to this sort of thing and you sang. You were hearing people – maybe you sang, I don't know – singing about Jesus dying on a bloody cross. Why do we sing those songs? That sounds horrible. Why is the cross the symbol of Christianity? The cross was humiliating in the first century. The cross was considered dying under a curse, under the curse, of God. Why is it our symbol? Why do we sing about it? Why do we love it?

And the answer is this. The answer is because of the empty tomb. The answer is because the crucified one, the one who died cursed on a tree, has been raised. This is what the angel was saying. "You are looking for Jesus, the one who was crucified."

See, when you see the empty tomb, you have to back all the way up to the crucifixion – this is what the angel did – and wrestle with what did Jesus' death mean? If this rabbi from Nazareth died under the curse of God on a cross, why in the world is He back? Is He back to haunt those who killed Him? That's not what's happening here.

See, when you look at the cross through the empty tomb, you realize that Jesus' death was a different kind of death. See, there are two things that Mark is very clear to point out in the arrest and trial and crucifixion of Jesus. These are two things that he's very clearly pointing out in his narrative. And they are: Jesus was innocent and that Jesus died under the curse of God. If you read through the narrative of Mark, the betrayal and the arrest and the trial and the crucifixion of Jesus, it's clear that Jesus was innocent. They called Him guilty but they had no charges that stuck with Him. He was innocent. He went to the cross silent. He went to the cross forgiving people. He went to the cross and didn't say, "Oh, I'm innocent. You can't kill me."

He just silently went to the cross He did it forgiving people, even forgiving the thief next to Him on the cross. He died saying, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

He died innocent and He died cursed. So, if He's innocent, why did He die under the curse of God on the cross? And the answer is because He was taking our curse. Jesus wasn't dying for His guilt, He was dying for our guilt. And Jesus fully died. He really died. One of my favorite songs right now is Sia's new song. I don't know if you've heard it. It's been on the radio. It's called "Alive." Great Easter song, by the way. We should've sang it, but we didn't.

Anyways, so she wrote this song originally with Adele for Adele's new album and it didn't make it onto her latest album. It didn't actually make the cut. But, everyone who's heard the song is glad it didn't make the cut because Sia sings the song so well. Like, her voice, the way she sings. Like her voice cracking under the emotional weight of the lyrics. The Guardian called it "the hymn for everyone."

And the chorus goes like this. I'm going to sing it to you. No, I'm joking. I'm not going to sing it to you. Anyways, this is how it goes into the chorus. And listen to the imagery here.

"I had a one-way ticket to a place where all the demons go
Where the wind don't change
And nothing in the ground can ever grow
No hope, just lies
And you're taught to cry in your pillow"

And then she says, "But I survived," and then she starts singing, "I'm still breathing, I'm still breathing," and then she busts into that, "I'm alive." She starts going crazy. "I'm alive."

Anyway. I got excited. It's a great song. And the message is really clear. This kind of song has been around forever. I mean, Diana Ross' "I will survive." Like, these songs are humanity's heroes. Songs like this, this is how we enthrone humanity's heroes. The ones that get the closest to death and death does not kill them. It almost kills them but it makes them stronger. They didn't die. They keep breathing. They keep struggling and they keep fighting and they get through. And this is humanity's heroes. It's always been humanity's

heroes.

Jesus faced Hell. He faced the place where demons go and He died. He stopped breathing, He didn't make it through. Why in the world would we call this man a hero? He went to the very brink and then, actually, He just fell off.

One scholar writes: "He died a terrible death. Crucified under the wrath of God. From all ordinary points of view..." – meaning our point of view, looking at it – "...as a crucified man, He left the world in the worst possible way."

So, from our standpoint, He left the world in the worst possible way and He had absolutely no hope in the afterlife. So, from our standpoint, He had no hope for the afterlife, according to the Greeks, and this is the worst possible way according to the Jews. Like, this is the worst way to die. But, He died in this way for us. His death was an exclusive, place-taking death so that the sting of death might be removed for us.

So, when the angel says, "You are looking for Jesus the crucified one," all of that is wrapped up into that statement. When he says, "Oh, you're looking for Jesus, the crucified one," everything that that meant: you're looking for the one who died. You're looking for the one who died under the curse of God, who died naked and alone and abandoned and denied and mocked and beaten. You're looking for Him, but He is not here. He has been raised. Come, see where they laid Him. Meaning He was here.

See, this wasn't simply an empty tomb, this was an emptied tomb. Oh, He was here. He was dead, but not anymore. He's been raised from the dead. Oh, He did die and He was here and He was buried, but this tomb was borrowed. It's not His tomb. He borrowed it. It's empty now because Jesus beat death. He's been raised.

And this is what makes the cross the center of Christianity. This is what makes the crucified one the worshipped one. The fact that Jesus Christ beat death. And if the crucified one could be raised from the dead, then anyone could be raised from the dead. If this cursed man could be raised from the dead, then anyone could be raised from the dead. And that's actually the point of Easter.

Paul, as we read at the very beginning at our call to worship, says that Jesus' resurrection is the firstfruits of those who believe. Meaning Jesus was the first among many who would be raised to life and to never die again. Jesus was like the first buds of a new harvest promising more harvest to come.

Frederick Buechner, one of my favorite writers, says, "The resurrection means that the worst thing is never the last thing."

It means that Jesus has won. It means that Jesus has victory over death and the worst kind of death. What this means is that death doesn't have the last word. I know death has touched every single person in this room somehow and someday. The resurrection of Jesus means that death doesn't have the last word. All philosophies really try to deal with the problem of death and Jesus conquers death. Sin doesn't have the last word. Cancer doesn't have the last word. AIDS doesn't have the last word. Injustice doesn't have the last word. Violence doesn't have the last word. Jesus has the last word.

Because of the resurrection, what this also means is because of the resurrection, Jesus' words have actual life in them. They're real life, not just memories. When we talk about Jesus and sing about Jesus, we're not just saying pithy statements and pipe dreams. Jesus' words are alive because Jesus is alive. So, His words like, "Come to me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest," that means something. Those words are alive because Jesus is alive.

"Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."

Jesus isn't dead. He's an available savior. We can go to Him and find rest for our souls. When Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty," I believe that we have a real hunger for God. And this hunger brings a leanness to our souls when we try to feed it with things that don't satisfy, and these words mean something. They mean that Jesus is available. They mean Jesus' words have life.

Mark 10:45 says, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

In John 11, Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

See, all these words are true because Jesus is alive and they gave power to Jesus' words.

Finally, the angel says to these very alarmed women, "Go tell the disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.'"

The last thing that I want to point out this morning is that this resurrected Jesus is going after the disciples because they were hiding. After the crucifixion, all the disciples were hiding out in fear. We're told before the crucifixion that Peter denied Jesus, abandoned Jesus, you can say he walked away from Jesus, he fell away from Jesus. However you want to say it, that's what happened to Peter during Jesus' crucifixion. So, Peter ran and hid.

The rest of the disciples were scared for their lives. They were holed up in a room, afraid that the fate of Jesus would soon be their fate as well. "If they killed our leader, what are they going to do to us?"

So, they were all hiding from everyone. And Jesus is going after them. The angel was like, "Hey, He's not here. He's risen. Go tell the disciples Jesus is coming after them."

So, here's a question: is Jesus the only way to God? This is one of the biggest challenges many have with the claims of Christianity, especially in a pluralistic, non-judgmental city like San Francisco. Saying that Jesus is the only way to God sounds arrogant and it sounds close-minded. So, is Jesus the only way to God or do all roads somehow lead to God?

But, what if we actually have this backwards? What if we're not really the ones in this world who are religious travelers trying to find the right road to God? What if Jesus isn't the one and the only way that we go out into the universe to find God? What if the Bible is actually saying that the Gospel moves in the other direction? What if Jesus is the way that God has come to us? See, when we think that we are the ones trying to find God, trying to get God, wanting to bridge this big chasm over to the divine, in this way of thinking, God always seems just too far away. We want to cross over the divide into the divine, try to build a bridge across to Him, try to find the right path to get to Him. Just if we just had the missing piece.

Trying to find the right path to Him is like trying to find hidden Luke Skywalker in the universe and we just have part of the map, but then Jesus comes and shows the whole map and we're like, "Where have you been this whole movie?" It's like that kind of thing. We make it sound like we are the ones that are looking for God and God is the one who's hiding. Do all roads need to lead to God? I think that premise is wrong. It puts you looking for God and God hiding from you. But, that's not the story. I don't think you are the one looking for God, as much as it is that God is looking for you.

But, we hide. All of us hide. The Bible opens up with a story of humanity, and they lived in shalom, which is a Hebrew word for "interwovenness" and "harmony" and "peace." They were told not to eat this forbidden fruit and they eat it. The thing that happens to them is that they realize they're naked. That's the only before and after picture we get of this first couple. Before, they were naked and unashamed. Then after, they realized they were naked and they hid.

And then God went after them to find them and they hid from God. I mean, there it is right there at the very beginning of the Bible. How did we miss this? Why do we think that we're the ones looking for God and God is hiding? God is looking for us and we are hiding. We are the ones who are lost.

And so the angel says, "Go tell the disciples and Peter that Jesus is coming for them, because He's after them to redeem them, to save them, to find them because they're hiding again. But, Jesus is going to go find them."

What if it's not about all roads leading to God? What if it's really about the road God takes to get to us? This is what the cross and the grave really mean. This is the road of God getting to us, getting to you. What if holidays like Christmas and Good Friday and Easter are not really occasions to come to church, but are ways that the Church celebrates the actual

inbreaking of God where God makes a bridgehead in our world to pursue us. This is what Easter is about. That God's going after us. And it gives meaning to Jesus' death. It gives meaning to Jesus' resurrection. And Jesus is going after us. This is about God bridging into our world to save and redeem us. So, the question is: do we stop hiding?

Do we stop hiding behind false pretense, religion, and do we allow ourselves to be found by God? When this moment happened to me 20 years ago, I was a teenager. I didn't grow up in church, so I didn't have any framework for this. But, there was this really clear moment in my life when I sensed God going after me to find me and I was hiding and then I was exposed and I saw God and it was like Jesus said, "Follow me."

Again, I didn't have the framework for this. I didn't really know how this worked. And this is basically what I said. I said, "Yes. I will turn from my sin and I will follow you. Whatever that means," I told Jesus, "I'm in."

I had no idea what it meant at that moment. I just knew that He was coming after me to find me and I wanted to be found by God. So I said, "Whatever this means, Jesus, I'm in."

As a 15-year-old kid, I'm in. This morning, I want to invite you to do the same. I don't even know what way or what shape this looks like, but that you would say to Christ, "I'm in. I'll turn. I'll repent. I see that You're coming after me. I see it now. I'm in."

Let's pray.

Lord, I want to pray right now that I really believe that You've made a bridgehead into this world where You want to redeem and save and set right, that You want to make very clear today that message; the Gospel message that Your death meant something, that our sins are nailed to the cross, the things that separate us from You are nailed to the cross. In Your resurrection, we rise with You to have new life.

And I know in different ways and in various different ways You're pursuing people and I don't even confess to know, God, how, in every different situation, You're doing that. Whether right now over a series of events You're just making the light come on for someone or this is just as clear as they've ever heard it and they're like, "Yeah. Okay. I see it now," or whether they're just so uneasy right now because they're like, "There's no way that God's coming after me. There's no way. I'm not worthy of that. There's no way that God can love me with the things that I've done. There's no way that God could come after me with the things that I've said. There's no way God could come after me with the things that I've said to Him."

I pray that You would go after, Lord, if there's anyone here that, like Peter, has denied You, turned from You, ran from You. Go after them, Lord. In this time right now, I pray that we would respond to You and that we would respond to You in a real way, a way that we know, a decisive moment that we know that today, I decided to follow Jesus.

In Christ's name, amen.