“HE HAS RISEN!”

Mark 15:42–16:20

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.’”

In last week’s passage we saw how Jesus our King was forsaken by God on the cross. Ultimately it was so that we can be reunited with God in the most intimate fellowship. We also saw how Jesus didn’t save himself, so that he could save many others. In today’s passage we see a few faithful followers who remain at his cross to the end and participate in his burial. But we also see today that the story doesn’t end with his death. The angel proclaims the good news that Jesus has risen! We want to think about why the resurrection of Jesus is still the best news to all people and us. May God help us to learn from these faithful followers. And may God renew our hearts with the good news of the Risen Christ.

On Friday of Passion Week, at three in the afternoon, Jesus died. In verse 42 Mark reminds us that it’s actually Preparation Day, the day before the Sabbath. On the Sabbath no work can be done. So the day before, people would prepare by drawing enough water from the wells, shopping for food, cooking, and cleaning their homes and clothes. The Sabbath actually began on Friday when the sun set. So as evening approaches, there’s little time to spare. Jesus’ body is still hanging on a cross. His disciples and family are nowhere to be found. The faithful women who witnessed his death are powerless to do anything. But at this crucial time, an unusual man appears. His story is so important that it’s recorded in all four Gospels.

Mark gives us some important details about this man. Look at verse 43. Arimathea was a town in a farming area about 20 miles northwest of Jerusalem. But Joseph is no country farmer; he’s described as “a prominent member of the Council.” Evidently his farming business had been very successful. The Council is the Sanhedrin. It’s the ruling body of all Israel. This Council is in Jerusalem, and it has only 70 distinguished members. It’s the highest honor to be chosen to sit on this Council. Joseph isn’t just a member, but a “prominent” member among them. He’s prominent no doubt because he’s rich (Mt27:57), but also because he’s won the respect of many people. But he’s a member of this same Council that had gathered after Jesus’ arrest and stayed up all night, looking for evidence to put him to death. When Jesus finally confessed that he was the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One, all the Council members condemned him as worthy of death (14:61–64). Perhaps Joseph had refused to join that meeting. In any case, he had not consented to their decision and action (Lk23:51). Unlike most of his Council colleagues, Joseph believed in Jesus. Mark tells us in verse 43 that Joseph is “himself waiting for the kingdom of God.” It means Joseph believes the message of Jesus (1:15). His spiritual eyes are opened. He’s a successful man in this world, but his hope is in the kingdom of God. This prominent man is actually a disciple of Jesus (Mt27:57). Up to this point, he’d kept quiet about his faith, out of fear of the Jewish leadership (Jn19:38). But when Jesus is crucified so horribly, Joseph changes. He repents of his cowardice. He’s determined to honor Jesus in his death.

What does he do? Verse 43b says that he goes “boldly” to Pilate and asks for Jesus’ body. Jesus’ disciples had fled in fear, but Joseph comes forward. He’s a prominent member of the Council, but going to Pilate requires boldness even from him. Partly it’s because Joseph could lose his position on the Council for making such a public stand for someone the Council had clearly condemned. And partly it’s because Pilate the Roman governor could think Joseph is challenging his decision to execute Jesus. But Joseph has changed. He’s seen the great love of God in crucified Jesus, a perfect love that drives out all fear (1Jn4:18). This great love of God is what’s given Joseph the boldness to go to Pilate and ask for Jesus’ body. He’s a closet Christian no more.

How does Pilate respond? Look at verse 44a. Usually, it would take several days for a crucified person to actually die. Death would eventually come by asphyxiation. Jesus has been on the cross only since nine in the morning, but late in the afternoon he’s already dead. It’s likely because of the vicious flogging he received. Perhaps Pilate suspects that followers of Jesus might be trying to take Jesus down from the cross and keep him alive.

Read verses 44b,45. The centurion’s assignment is to stay at the execution site and make sure the crucified victims actually die. This centurion is the same man who stood there in front of Jesus on the cross, saw how he died, and said, “Surely this man was the Son of God!” (39) The centurion was a Gentile, not a Jew, but he too was changed by witnessing the crucifixion of Jesus. However, he still has to do his job. So he reports to Pilate to confirm that Jesus in fact died. The centurion’s eyewitness testimony becomes an important part of the gospel account. Jesus really did die. So it says that after confirming this, Pilate agrees to give the body to Joseph. In Greek, it literally says “the corpse.” So what did Joseph do with the corpse? Look at verse 46. Here the Greek word for “body” or “it” is actually the word “him.” So verse 46 would better be translated as, “So Joseph bought some linen cloth, took *him* down, wrapped *him* in the linen, and placed *him* in a tomb cut out of rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance to the tomb” (italics added). It shows us that Joseph is doing these things to Jesus. He’s treating Jesus in his death with the dignity and honor he deserves. It’s not only an act of courage; it’s an act of love. Jesus is his King. Before wrapping him in linen, Joseph also likely has the body washed. As a wealthy man, he’s probably got his servants helping him. The tomb is a brand new one, and it’s actually Joseph’s own tomb (Mt27:60; Jn19:41). Only rich people owned tombs in Jerusalem, and Joseph has one prepared for himself. But at this moment he decides to give it to Jesus. Actually, when people were crucified, their bodies were either allowed to rot on the crosses, be picked apart by creatures, or thrown into mass graves where they would be indistinguishable from others. It was to dishonor them as much as possible. But Joseph preserves the crucified body of Jesus and protects it in his own tomb.

Look at verse 47. We’ve already seen that Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and Salome had watched Jesus’ death at a distance (40). They along with many other women had followed Jesus in Galilee and cared for his needs (41). Now Mary Magdalene and this other Mary stay to watch Joseph of Arimathea bury Jesus before sundown. They want to see exactly where the tomb was, so that they can come back there after the Sabbath. Though they seem so helpless, they stay there out of their love for Jesus. In their society women’s eyewitness accounts were not considered reliable. But Jesus had treated women differently; he included women among his disciples and respected them as his servants. Now, when all his male disciples are gone, these faithful women become the main characters in his story.

Look at 16:1. The Sabbath was over at sundown on Saturday. At that time, merchants would reopen, and people would go out shopping. Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome are the same three women mentioned at the death of Jesus. Two of them witnessed his burial. Now the three regroup Saturday evening to buy spices. Though required by the law to stay home on the Sabbath, they could not stop thinking about Jesus. Friday and Saturday nights must’ve been sleepless for them. Their hearts must’ve been broken after witnessing all the evil done to Jesus. They saw how hurriedly he’d been buried, and to them it didn’t seem right; he didn’t need only washing and linen, but a proper anointing. The spices they bought were actually oiled. They were not used to preserve a corpse, as with embalming, but to keep the body from smelling from decay for as long as possible. These women had been serving Jesus the past few years; now they’re ready to serve him one last time.

Read verses 2,3. The first day of the week is Sunday. At sunrise these ladies are walking out of the city to the tomb where Jesus was buried. But on the way, they suddenly realize that the tomb had been sealed by a stone, and that stone is way too big and way too heavy for them to move. Anyway, they keep going. What happens when they get there? Read verse 4. They’re shocked that the very large stone has already been rolled away! They don’t know that an angel has already moved it (Mt28:2). In fact, God Almighty raised Jesus from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him (Ac2:24). No power or obstacle could keep him in the tomb.

Read verse 5. This “young man” is an angel dressed in white. When the women see him sitting on the right side where Jesus’ body had been, they’re alarmed. Wild thoughts are now racing through their minds. They came all prepared to take care of Jesus’ body, but it’s not there. They’re wondering if, in a final act of evil, some people have come and taken his body out of there, to dishonor him one last time (Jn20:13b).

Read verse 6. The angel gives these women the good news first: Jesus has risen! These women had witnessed his crucifixion. They saw him die. They saw him buried, in this very spot. But God’s angel proclaims to them that Jesus is risen. It’s not an emotional or mystical experience, or a symbolism, or a philosophy, but a historical fact. It’s the good news. Why is the resurrection of Jesus good news to us?

**First**, his resurrection proves that God will judge the world with justice. Evil people tried to get rid of Jesus, smearing him with false accusations and a shameful death. But God did not abandon Jesus to the grave. God raised him from the dead. The world today is still full of evil. People get away with doing many wicked things. But God is still there. He’s still living. Acts 17:31 says, “For [God] has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.”

**Second**, Jesus’ resurrection proves that all he did and said was true. The religious leaders wanted Jesus crucified and cursed so that they could totally discredit him and his teachings as fraudulent. But when God raised Jesus from the dead, it proved that Jesus is authentic, that he’s the Holy and Righteous One (Ac3:14), and that all his predictions came true. Not only were his predictions of his resurrection true, but all Jesus’ words are true. In 13:31 Jesus said, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.” Because Jesus rose from the dead, we can believe absolutely everything he said.

**Third**, Jesus’ resurrection shows us that God accepted his death on the cross for our sins. If Jesus had just died, his death would have been just another sorrowful and tragic story. But by raising him from the dead, God proved that his death really is the atoning sacrifice for our sins (1Jn2:2). Our sins will never be atoned for through anything we could ever do. Our sins are atoned for through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Romans 4:25 says, “He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.” Because Jesus both died and rose again, Peter told people, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Ac2:38). Everyone who believes in the Risen Jesus receives forgiveness of sins through his name (Ac10:43; 13:38; 26:18).

**Fourth**, Jesus’ resurrection gives all who believe a living hope in the kingdom of God. When he first began his ministry Jesus said, “The time has come. The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!” (1:15) Now, through his death and resurrection Jesus opened the way back to the kingdom of God. This way is open to anyone who repents and believes the good news. Colossians 1:13,14 reads, “For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” Through the resurrection of Jesus this kingdom is now our living hope. 1 Peter 1:3,4 reads, “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you…” Our faith in the resurrection of Jesus gives us hope to someday see I the kingdom of God other believers who died. Paul wrote, “For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him” (1Th4:14). Without believing the resurrection of Jesus, our hearts and minds are engrossed in this world. Deep within we have fears and sorrows. But when we truly believe in the resurrection of Jesus, a living hope in the kingdom of God begins to grow in our hearts like a mustard seed. This living hope through his resurrection changes us. We need to share this living hope with people today.

**Fifth**, Jesus’ resurrection gives us power to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow him. Mark was writing to the early Christians in Rome who were facing intense persecution because of their faith in Jesus. He reminds them that Jesus’ resurrection is really good news. It would give them courage to endure all the shame and suffering in following Jesus. Before knowing the resurrection of Jesus, Peter himself had fallen into fear and denied Jesus before a servant girl. But after witnessing the resurrection of Jesus, he became courageous. He not only experienced the grace of Jesus, but also the boldness to proclaim the gospel of Jesus even to his enemies. After meeting the Risen Jesus, Paul also had God’s power to live as a courageous gospel witness, despite all the suffering he experienced. He wrote, “But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard-pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body” (2Co4:7–10). The life of Jesus is his resurrected life. Believing Jesus’ resurrection gives us his life within us, and it gives us a power to endure suffering that we could never have on our own.

Read verse 7. The angel reminded the women of Jesus’ words to Peter and his other disciples. Jesus had predicted that they would all fall away, but after his resurrection he would meet them again in Galilee (14:28). The angel wanted the women to understand the evidence of the empty tomb based on the word of Jesus. We too can believe in and understand his resurrection based on his word. How did the women respond? Read verse 8. Fear paralyzed them from saying anything. They didn’t brag about their experience; they needed God’s help to process it. It’s further evidence that what they witnessed was true.

In verses 9–20 we see how the Risen Jesus repeatedly appears to his followers, and how they stubbornly refuse to believe the good news. Nevertheless, he commands them to go and preach the good news to all creation (15). He gives them absolute confidence in the gospel message (16). And he promises that God will work greatly even through them. Read verses 19,20. Jesus is now seated at the right hand of God, but he’s also still working in this world. And we learn that the disciples overcame themselves and obeyed his word, and that’s how the Lord worked with them. We too need to overcome our unbelief and obey his word.

Today we mainly thought about what Jesus’ resurrection means to us. We also learned from the good example of Joseph of Arimathea and the women who were faithful to Jesus to the end. May God renew each of us with the good news that Jesus has risen! May this good news give us a living hope and courage to follow Jesus in the way of the cross.