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SERMON TITLE: He is Risen: A Most Risky Proclamation

SCRIPTURE: Mark 16 & Luke 24, selected

DATE: April 17, 2022 Easter Sunday

Online service at www.fpcd.org/live-stream

Read also Psalm 27:1, 4-6.

Have you ever had a circumstance when someone told you something important but you really did not listen closely?

It might have been instructions or directions of some kind. It might have been wishes that someone wanted carried out.

My father used to tell me every time I went to visit him all about what to do when he died. I was like, *‘why do I need this information?’* So I half listened and pretended I was interested. But really, it went in one ear and out the other. Yawn.

But then came the day I was in charge and I was scrambling. “Now what did he say about this? What am I supposed to do for that? Where is this located?” It was all the harder after my father died.

Imagine the disciples on this sunny Easter day. They had been told numerous times ahead of this event of many of the details. They had been told Jesus would be arrested; that there would be a trial; that Jesus would be condemned and crucified, but not-to-worry, he would be raised.

I am not sure they yawned or that it went entirely “in one ear and out the other,” but they did wonder to one another, “What is this rising from the dead?” (Mark 9:9-10) But they were afraid to ask him. Or, their minds were elsewhere, like when he came into his power, could he give them positions as their right-hand men?

So here they were—early Sunday morning. Let’s read Mark 16:1-8

Saturday evening, when the Sabbath ended, Mary Magdalene and Salome and Mary the mother of James went out and purchased burial spices so they could anoint Jesus’ body. Very early on Sunday morning, just at sunrise, they went to the tomb. On the way they were asking each other, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?” But as they arrived, they looked up and saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled aside. When they entered the tomb, they saw a young man clothed in a white robe sitting on the right side. The women were shocked, but the angel said, “Don’t be alarmed. You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He isn’t here! He is risen from the dead! Look, this is where they laid his body. Now go and tell his disciples, including Peter, that Jesus is going ahead of you to Galilee. You will see him there, just as he told you before he died.” The women fled from the tomb, trembling and bewildered, and *they said nothing to anyone because they were too frightened.*

Luke, in his Gospel, adds that the angel also told them to *remember his words . . .*

that the Son of Man must be betrayed into the hands of sinful men and be crucified, and that he would rise again on the third day. [Then they remembered]. So they rushed back from the tomb to tell his eleven disciples -- and everyone else -- what had happened. . . . But the story *sounded like nonsense to the men, so they didn’t believe it* (24:7-9, 11).

It is so hard to move from tragedy to resurrection. Let’s highlight some words to see the women’s mindset:

- ~ They discussed, “Who will roll away the stone?”
- ~ They were shocked to see a young man (angel) in the tomb.
- ~ They fled, trembling and bewildered.
- ~ They said nothing to anyone because they were too frightened. ☹

Here are the encouragements:

- ~ The stone had already been rolled aside.
- ~ An angel said don’t be alarmed. Jesus isn’t here. He is risen from the dead.
- ~ He has gone ahead of you to Galilee, just as he told you before he died.
- ~ You will see him there.

Did you catch that? He had told them he would rise in three days and that he would meet them in Galilee. He actually told them this three different times.

Their listening skills rivaled mine! **How hard it is when tragedy happens to move from doubt to faith.** Nevertheless, the plan of God presses on. Let’s read further. READ Mk 16:12-13

Afterward Jesus appeared in a different form to two of his followers who were walking from Jerusalem into the country. They rushed back to tell the others, but no one believed them. Still later he appeared to the eleven disciples as they were eating together. He rebuked them for their stubborn unbelief because they refused to believe those who had seen him after he had been raised from the dead.

Ouch! Jesus is getting a little testy.

Luke adds more details about when Jesus appeared while they were eating:

But the whole group was startled and frightened, thinking they were seeing a ghost! “Why are you frightened?” Jesus asked. “Why are your hearts filled with doubt? Look at my hands. Look at my feet. You can see that it’s really me. Touch me and make sure that I am not a ghost, because ghosts don’t have bodies, as you see that I do.” As he spoke,

he showed them his hands and his feet. Still they stood there in disbelief, filled with joy and wonder. Then he asked them, “Do you have anything here to eat?” They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he ate it as they watched. (Luke 24:37-43)

It is hard to move from tragedy to resurrection, from doubt to faith. If you can think of it this way, **it is hard to move from the garden of Gethsemane to the garden of Eden.** Again, here is their mindset:

- ~ No one believed them.
- ~ Startled and frightened, thinking they were seeing a ghost!
- ~ Filled with doubt.
- ~ Stood there in disbelief.

It is hard to move from tragedy to resurrection, doubt to faith, from the garden of Gethsemane to the garden of Eden. **But that is what Jesus is asking us to do, even today.**

Jesus, you see, is building his church with these people. That is why you are here this morning—you are his church proclaiming HE IS RISEN! I am thrilled that you are here. But that begs the question . . . What is your mindset?

- Are you filled with doubt at the proclamation that Jesus is alive?
- Do you struggle with fear?
- Do you think Jesus could not possibly speak to you today?

I have got a challenge for you. Come together with like-minded friends each week and face your fears, doubt, and struggles!

You might say, ‘Well, I only come twice a year—Easter and Christmas.’ Or, I can worship God in my backyard or on the golf course. Or, I watch online and it is good enough for me.

I want to challenge you that none of those things are good enough. Jesus said, “Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.” (Lk 11:9-10)

You might object and say, “This happened so long ago. I don’t think I can hear Jesus’ voice today.

Someone I know recently told me this story about how she flew over the Big Island in Hawaii to see the active volcano. It has destroyed homes, farms, and evaporated the biggest fresh water lake within one hour of lava reaching it. As she saw the smoldering lava at ocean’s edge, a Scripture came to mind. It prophesies of Jesus. He came: *“to give God’s people a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. God’s people will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, to display his glory. They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations”* (Isaiah 61:3)

She writes of her pictures: “This is obviously the ashes part of His story, but then right around the corner from that destruction is this: 200-300 feet waterfalls as far as you can see. Lush beautiful

trees. Colorful flowers and fruits. Amazing reef with fish everywhere. He will bring beauty from ashes.” My friend felt as if Jesus was personally speaking to her on the plane that day to teach her this truth.¹

Jesus will speak to you, too, opening your eyes to his wonder, if you seek him.

You might argue, “Christianity is too old fashioned. It is behind the times. It is too narrow.”

Who, then, shapes your thoughts? Do you look to the culture around you who listen to each other? Do you listen to celebrities or politicians or social media? You realize they do not look any farther than each other? All of that is a TRAP! Their timeframe is very limited and their ideas are tearing humanity apart, for cultures and social progress are not necessarily on an upward trajectory. Cultures go up and down in moral and ethical standards, depending on who and what shapes them.

Look up! Follow your faith. Give yourself to God. Give God his Sundays back. Study Jesus and *be swayed by your faith, rather than the culture, which only lasts for one generation.* Don’t you want something more lasting?

Jesus is telling you now, just like he told those early disciples:

“Why are you frightened? Why are your hearts filled with doubt? Look at my hands. Look at my feet. You can see that it’s really me. Touch me and make sure that I am not a ghost, because ghosts don’t have bodies, as you see that I do.” As they heard his words, they began to be filled with joy and wonder.

They met every day for prayer: the first church. They went all over the world with this good news. They wrote down his story and his guiding principles. We are that church today. It is not a parttime thing. You would never send your kids to school just two days a year. You must give your all. Many good things happen within these walls, which spill out into the larger community.

It is a risky proclamation because it must take priority in your life. But the risk of getting this one wrong is a far greater risk. Remember the words he said. Don’t yawn or turn a deaf ear! You have so much to gain!

“The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of his enemies. He will be killed, but three days later he will rise from the dead” (Mark 9:31).

I declare to you, “HE IS RISEN, JUST AS HE SAID!” And the people say, “HE IS RISEN INDEED!”

AMEN

¹ You can see the pictures online in the sermon video for April 17, 2022.