

**He Is Not Here**

## COMMUNION

April 4, 2021

**Mark 16: 1-8**

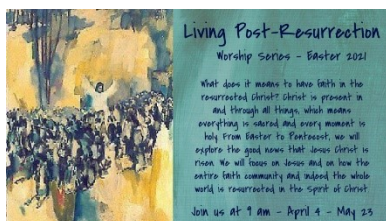
*<sup>1</sup> When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. <sup>2</sup> And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. <sup>3</sup> They had been saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" <sup>4</sup> When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back.*

*<sup>5</sup> As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. <sup>6</sup> But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. <sup>7</sup> But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you." <sup>8</sup> So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.*

**Acts 10: 34-40**

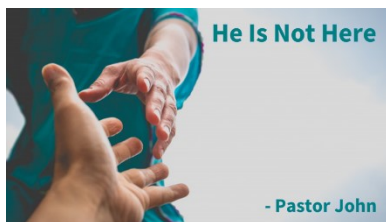
*<sup>34</sup> Then Peter began to speak to them: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, <sup>35</sup> but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. <sup>36</sup> You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ — he is Lord of all. <sup>37</sup> That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: <sup>38</sup> how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by*

*the devil, for God was with him. <sup>39</sup> We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; <sup>40</sup> but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear.*



Welcome to our Easter worship series, "Living Post-Resurrection". Beginning today and running through Pentecost Sunday in late May, we will talk about what it

means to have faith in the resurrected Christ. We will focus in on one of the most often overlooked messages of the Christian faith: that Christ is present in and through all things, which means everything is sacred and every moment is holy. From Easter to Pentecost, we will explore the good news that Jesus Christ is risen – not just physically from the grave some two thousand years ago but in every aspect of our lives and world. We will learn how to live with awe – in and through the mundane, ordinary of our lives. We begin focusing on Jesus, a single person, and end at Pentecost, where we understand the way in which the entire faith community and indeed the whole world is resurrected in the Spirit of Christ. As we get started today, a word of prayer...



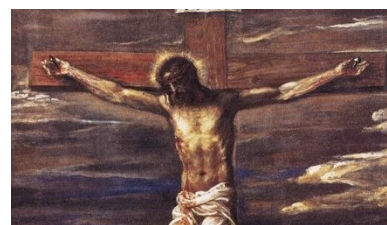
Today we begin with "He Is Not Here" as we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. We begin today in Mark 16. I invite you to turn there with

me as we begin to explore how Christ does not always appear as we think he should yet is ever present and always giving new life. We begin this morning with the three women as they go to the tomb to prepare Jesus' body. Before we turn to Mark 16, let us begin with a word of prayer...

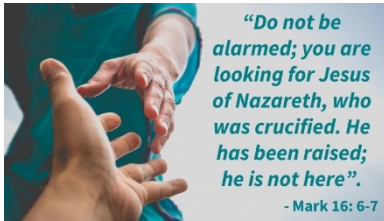
Mary Magdalene, Jesus' mother Mary, and Salome go to the tomb early on the first day of the week, bringing spices to anoint Jesus' body. For these women, the first day of the week would be what we call Sunday. For Jews, their Sabbath, their holy day, is Saturday. Jesus' body had been quickly placed in the tomb on Friday later afternoon. The Sabbath began at sunset on Friday, so Joseph hurried to Pilate to get permission to care for Jesus' body. Joseph wrapped and placed the body in his own tomb. Joseph's act of respect was one of the few dignities afforded Jesus during these last two days of his life.

The last week of Jesus' life was quite the roller coaster for Jesus and for his disciples and followers. Just a week ago, on what we know as Palm Sunday, the crowds cheered the coming king, thinking he would liberate the Jews from their Roman overlords. The long-awaited political Messiah rode into Jerusalem on the colt, raising hope and reviving dreams. As the week unfolds, Jesus causes a stir in the temple, toppling over the tables of the money changers and driving out the sellers of sacrificial animals. He continues to teach and to tell over and over of his coming death and resurrection. On Thursday Judas agrees to betray Jesus. Later that night Jesus washes the disciples' feet and shares the first communion with them. Judas was there. Had his feet washed and partook in communion. Late that night Jesus goes to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. His will wavers as he considers what lies ahead. The crowd with swords and clubs arrives, arrests Jesus and takes him to face the high priest and the council. It is during this time of trial and questioning and accusations that Peter denies Jesus three times in the outer courtyard.

As morning dawns Jesus is brought to see Pilate. The Jews do not have the power to crucify. Pilate finds that Jesus has committed no crime yet bows to the crowd's shouts to crucify Jesus. Jesus is flogged by the Roman guards, lead out to Golgotha, carrying his cross to the place of the skull, and is placed on the cross by nine in the morning. Jesus does not fight back; he does not rage against his oppressors. Instead he offers them forgiveness, because they do not know what they are doing. At noon darkness fell over the land; it lasted three hours. At three o'clock Jesus breathed his last. The curtain in the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. That which had separated the Jews from the Holy of Holies was torn in two. Standing at a distance from the cross were Mary Magdalene, Jesus' mother Mary, and Salome. Mary Magdalene and Mary, his mother, followed Joseph. They were there when he rolled the stone in front of the tomb.



The Sabbath is a somber day for Jesus' disciples, his followers, his family. They sit huddled together, partly fearing for their own lives, partly in shock at what has happened to Jesus, their Lord. Hopelessness and shock pervade the room as they think about Jesus on the cross and in the grave. As the women arrive at the tomb they wonder, *"Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?"* They too are numb. They have gathered the necessary spices and have walked to the place where Jesus' body was laid. When they arrive, they look up and discover that the very large stone had already been rolled back. Entering the tomb, a young man dressed in a white robe says these words to them:



*"Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here... Look, there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you". (Verses 6-7)*

Mary Magdalene, Jesus' mother Mary, and Salome flee the tomb. They are both terrified and amazed at what they have heard. Out of fear, they say nothing to the disciples or to anyone else. Questions must have arisen in their minds. If Jesus is alive, then, where is he? Yes, he is not here, but why doesn't immediately appear to the disciples and other followers? The resurrected Christ will appear many times to many different people. Often, they do not recognize him right away; at other times they doubt if it really is Jesus. Mary saw him as the gardener, two disciples saw him as a fellow traveler on the road to Emmaus, and the disciples first saw him as a man walking along the seashore. In the upper room, the disciples questioned if it was really Jesus, Thomas demanding to touch the nail holes and the scar on his side. We too, when we are willing, can and will meet Jesus in many different ways.

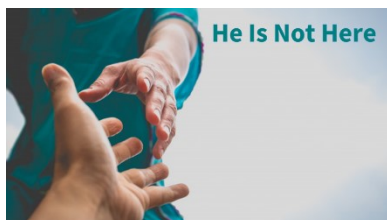
For the month of March our church focused in on the five habits of highly missional people that were in our Lenten book, Surprise the World. These five habits were



to bless others, eat with others, listen to the Holy Spirit, learn Jesus, and be sent ones. The challenge was and is to practice these habits regularly so that they each become part of our everyday rhythms of life.

When we practice these habits, we will encounter Jesus in surprising ways. For example, when we share a meal with someone who is hungry, as we hear their story, we can sometimes meet Jesus in them. Like the two disciples that walked with a fellow traveler on the road to Emmaus, we too might find ourselves in Jesus' presence when we least expect it. This is how the risen Jesus appears at the end of Mark's story.

As Mark's gospel ends, Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene and then to two of his disciples. They begin to circulate the news that Jesus is alive, that he has risen. Lastly Jesus appears to the eleven disciples, commissioning them to "*proclaim the good news to the whole creation*". As Mark's gospel ends, Jesus then ascends into heaven and the disciples begin to tell the world the good news of Jesus Christ. Despite persecution and even death, the church begins to grow as the disciples begin to preach the good news of Jesus to their fellow Jews.

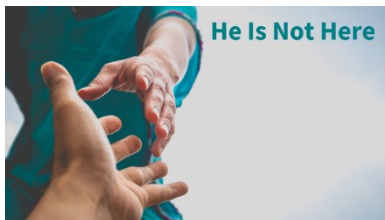


Next, we jump ahead in the Biblical story, to Acts 10.

Turn there with me as we continue the story of Easter.

As Acts begins, the Holy Spirit comes and empowers the disciples to preach and heal. Stephen is stoned for his faith and Saul has his conversion experience, becoming Paul. Paul begins to preach the good news of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, the non-Jews. This creates the first serious conflict in the early church. Was Jesus sent to the Jews or to the whole world? Was the good news of Jesus Christ just for the chosen people or was this good news for everyone?

Just prior to Acts 10, Peter has a vision from God and then is sent to Cornelius, a Roman centurion. Both of these experiences proceed our second passage for today. These experiences form a new understanding in Peter that relates to the conflict surrounding who the good news is for – Jew or Gentile? The answer is revealed in verses 34 and 35. Here Peter says, *"I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him"*. The good news is for everybody – Jew and Gentile, slave and free, men and women, young and old, saint and sinner, you and me – because Jesus is *"Lord of all"*. You, me, those watching from home, those who have no idea that today is Easter Sunday, those who are apathetic to faith... all people. Jesus is Lord of all. While we know that one day every knee will bow, the present reality is that some do not acknowledge Jesus as Lord. And yet God still loves them. And God wants to have a relationship with them.



In our passage from Acts, Peter has come to understand that all people are creations of God, that all people are dearly beloved children. He understands that he and his fellow disciples and apostles are all *"witnesses"* to the preaching and the doing of good and the healing that Jesus offered through the power of the Spirit of God within him. And Peter understands now that this good news is good news for all people everywhere. Peter lived through the hard days of Holy Week and lived with the guilt of denying Jesus three times. Peter knew that Jesus was not there with them anymore. But that was not the end of the story.

In our passage from Acts, Peter acknowledges that Jesus was raised on the third day and that he appeared to many, including Peter himself on several occasions. On one of these occasions, Peter himself experienced grace and forgiveness, compassion and love in his encounters with the risen Christ. Peter experienced firsthand the good news of Jesus Christ and understood his commission to share this good news with all people everywhere.

The message of Easter is so much greater than an empty tomb; it is so much larger than simply a resurrected Jesus. It is much more expansive than the proclamation that Jesus rose from a literal grave two thousand years ago. Jesus rose not just to sit at the father's right hand in heaven, but to dwell in Spirit in each of us who call on him as our king, as our Lord, as our Savior. Easter is the beginning of the story of Jesus Christ becoming present in and through each of us. The risen Christ is present and can be encountered every day if only we have eyes to see and ears to hear and hearts to feel.

As we proclaim, "He is risen!" may it not just be from the grave, but may he be risen in our hearts too as we too seek to witness to the good news of Jesus Christ each and every day. May we live each day as resurrection people, bringing the good news of Jesus Christ to a world in need. May it be so for you and for me. Amen and amen.



**GPS – Grow, Pray, Study**

- 1) *Grow*. As we consider that Jesus is risen and alive in us, how has his place in your heart grown over the course of your faith journey?
- 2) *Pray*. How does your day to day life reveal Jesus as Lord of your life? Take some time to pray about ways that you can better witness to your faith.
- 3) *Study*. Read Matthew 28:1-10 and John 20:1-18. How are these accounts of the resurrection different? How are they the same?