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HCC Sermon: Jesus Raised

Mark 16:1-8

Sermon Outline

INTRODUCTION

1. Image: Preparing to preach this morning's passage reminded me of a conversation that I had with a college student that I mentored when I still lived in Dallas.
2. Need: We forget that a cornerstone of the Christian faith is the resurrection of Jesus
3. Subject: How does the resurrection make a difference in our lives?
4. Text: Mark 16:1-8
5. Preview: This morning's message, we'll look at a disbelief, a testimony, and an implication.

BODY.

I. Some believe that the resurrection is untrue
   A. The three women did not believe in the resurrection.
      1. The three women witnessed the death and burial of Jesus
      2. The three women brought spices to anoint Jesus
      3. The three women thought that the tomb remained sealed.
   B. People do not believe in the resurrection because it seems extraordinary.
      1. People try to explain away the resurrection
         a. He was not really dead
         b. His followers had stolen his body (Matthew)
      2. People do not believe in the resurrection because they see things decay.
II. But the resurrection is true
   A. Mark explains that the resurrection is true.
      1. The stone is rolled away for the women to see into the tomb.
      2. The young man informs the women that Jesus had risen.
      3. Jesus fulfilled his predictions about his death and resurrection.
   B. The resurrection is true because it proves that Jesus accomplished his mission (theological implications of the resurrection)
III. We must follow Jesus on the pathway of discipleship
   A. Mark composes his ending to invite readers onto the pathway of discipleship
      1. Mark recognizes that the followers of Jesus will fail when they follow Him.
         a. The disciples and Peter are absent from the resurrection account.

b. Mark depicts the women's failure to carry out the young man's instruction.
c. Mark records the failures to show that God will carry out his will despite the failure of his people.
    i. The women do inform the disciples of Jesus's resurrection
    ii. The disciples do proclaim the gospel to the ends of the earth.

2. Despite our failure, God invites us to join him again to follow Him.
    a. The young man instructs the women to go to Galilee (16:7)
    b. Jesus began his ministry in Galilee anew (1:16)

B. Follow Jesus on the pathway of discipleship
    1. [Unbelievers]: Believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross for your sins
    2. [Believers]: Follow Jesus by denying yourself and pursuing his will (Mark 8:34).

CONCLUSION

1. Summary: Some believe that the resurrection is untrue, but the resurrection is true, so we must follow Jesus on the pathway of discipleship.
2. Closing Image: In 2009, a retired minister of the First Unitarian Church of Portland Oregon, interviewed Christpher Hitchens, a famous atheist

MANUSCRIPT

Preparing to preach this morning's passage reminded me of a conversation that I had with a college student that I mentored when I still lived in Dallas. He shared with me that he had an opportunity to explain the gospel to his college group recently. He recalled how he shared about Jesus coming to earth to live a perfect life and die on the cross for our sins. But then his face turned downcast. This prompted me to ask him: "It seems like you did a great job sharing the gospel. But you don't seem very happy." He disclosed to me that a college leader pulled him aside afterward to give him some feedback. The college leader informed my mentee that he had left out a key part of the gospel. The resurrection. Without the resurrection, my mentee had shared a deficient gospel. A partial gospel. This conversation caused to make a mental note to self. Never leave out the resurrection when I talk about the gospel.

If the Christian faith resembled the roof of a home, then one of the load-bearing columns would be the resurrection. Without the resurrection, our Christian faith would crash to the ground. Or if you prefer another image, think of an airplane. If the Christian faith resembled a Boeing 777, then the resurrection would be one of its wings. Without the resurrection, then our Christian faith would tumble to the ground.

We forget that a cornerstone of the Christian faith is the resurrection of Jesus. Why do we find ourselves leaving out the resurrection? Sometimes, we reduce the Christian faith to what we should do. Love our neighbors as ourselves. Help our neighbor take out their trash bin on trash day when they travel out of town. Contribute to the nearby

homeless shelter. Donate canned food to the Houston food bank. You don't need to believe in the resurrection to do these things. Or consider how some of us might reduce the Christian faith to values. We value the sanctity of human life. We value treating people with equity. We value the family. To hold these values again doesn't require the belief in the resurrection. After all, we might even think that the gospels themselves focus so much on the life of Jesus. We should model our life on what he did. Follow his example. To do what Jesus did doesn't require us to necessarily believe in the resurrection. But to neglect the resurrection endangers our faith. I would argue that forgetting the importance of the resurrection means we don't understand Jesus's mission.

Why is the resurrection important? Why is it critical to the understanding of the Christian faith? Why do Christians consider resurrection one of the foundational truths to our faith? **How does it make a difference in our lives?**

To answer this question, we'll look at the resurrection account that Laney just read for us from **Mark, chapter 16, verse one thru eight**. If you are not there yet, then I would invite you to turn your Bibles there. Mark, chapter 16, verse one thru eight.

Now if you look at your Bible, then you'll discover that there are more verses after verse 8. Why did we not include these additional verses in this morning's sermon? If you look at your Bibles, then you'll see a heading: "Some of the Earliest Manuscripts do not include 16:9-20". We call verse 9 thru 20 the longer ending of Mark. But this morning we'll focus on the shorter ending of Mark, verse one thru 8.

Let me explain why. The shorter ending is likely what Mark wrote for a few reasons. First, the earliest maunscripts of the gospel of Mark end at verse 8 and do not continue to verse 20. Second, the early church fathers show no knowledge of the longer ending. Their comments concerning the gospel of Mark typically end at verse 8. Third, the style and vocabulary of verse 9 thru 20 doesn't match the style and vocabulary of the rest of Mark. While the contents of verse 9 thru 20 may be true, it is not what Mark intended to be the ending of his gospel.

For those of you who have not been here the last two weeks, we have covered the death of Jesus Christ on the cross and his burial in a garden tomb. Mark now records for us what happens three days after his death and burial.

This morning's message will have three parts. First, we'll talk about **disbelief**. Why do people not believe in resurrection? What makes it difficult for people to believe that Jesus could have returned to life. Second, we'll talk about the **testimony**. What did the first witnesses of the resurrection see? What did they hear? What is the testimony that points to Jesus rising from the dead. Third, we'll talk about the **implications**. If Jesus rose from the dead, then what the implications for our lives? How does belief in the resurrection change us? What does it prompt us to think, belief, feel, or do? Again, we'll talk about three things. **Disbelief. Testimony. Implication.**

First, let's turn our attention to disbelief. **Some people believe that the resurrection is untrue**. It is impossible for someone to die and come back to life. The

resurrection could not have happened. The resurrection is merely a fabrication. **Some people believe that the resurrection is untrue**.

The people who disbelieve the resurrection resemble the three women in our passage. **The three women do not believe in the resurrection**. Look at verse 1. *When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magadalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome brought spices so that they might anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb.*

Mark reintroduces us to the three women. Mary Magadalene. Mary the mother of James. Salome. **These three women witnessed the death and burial of Jesus**. Mark recorded that that they were present when Jesus died at the cross (15:40). They also watched Jesus being placed in a tomb (15:47). They believed that Jesus had died. (He's dead, Jim.)

Not only did they witness the death of Jesus, but they also wanted to properly prepare Jesus's body for burial. **The three women brought spices to anoint Jesus**. The Jews did not embalm their dead like the Egyptians. Instead, they would use spices the mask to odor of a decomposing corpse. Archaeologists found jars of spices and ointments within the tombs in Israel indicating that these three women followed normal Jewish burial practices.

Normally, the Jews would anoint the body upon their death. But recall that Jesus had to be buried quickly because Jesus died late Friday near sundown. When the sun set on

Friday, the Sabbath would begin. The women would not be able to anoint the body on the Sabbath. Instead, they waited until Sunday, which is the first day of the week.

These details in the text indicate to the reader and to us that these women believed Jesus had died. They did not believe that he would rise from the dead. There's one last detail that also supports this idea. **The three women thought that the tomb remained sealed.** Look at verse 3. *And they were saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb.*

To seal a tomb in first 1st century, one would not use a door or gate. They would use a large piece of stone chiseled int a shape of a disc. This would allow a group of people to roll the stone into place to seal off a tomb. A single person would have insufficient strength to roll away the stone. Some of these stones weighed half a ton. Look at verse 4. *And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back – it was very large.* Joseph did not seal with the tomb with a small stone, but a large one. It would require a group of people to move. The stone kept out grave robbers and animals. The women expected the tomb to be sealed when they arrived. In their hurry to anoint Jesus' body, they didn't consider how they would gain access to the tomb. Again, the women believed that Jesus was dead.

Why do people not believe in the resurrection? Resurrection seems extraordinary. It is not normal. People do not typically come back to life. **People do not believe in the resurrection because it seems extraordinary.**

Since people refuse to believe in the resurrection, **people try to explain away the resurrection**. They come up with other ways to explain that the resurrection did not

happen. Let me give you two. First, some believe that Jesus did not really die. He passed out on the cross. The Romans buried a person barely alive. Jesus recovered his strength over the course of three days, moved the stone, and left.

Now you might think to yourself. This theory doesn't quite make sense because the Romans knew Jesus had died. If you look earlier, Pilate sends someone to verify that Jesus had died (15:44). In other gospel accounts, they used a spear to pierce his side to determine that he had died.

If Jesus had really died, then there must be another theory. **The followers of Jesus had stolen his body**. In fact, this theory is recorded in Matthew (Matthew 28:12-14). The religious leaders pay the guards to spread the story that the followers of Jesus had stolen the body.

Now again, this theory doesn't make sense because the followers of Jesus abandoned him at the garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:50). Even Peter, his most devoted follower, left Jesus behind (14:66-72). Even in today's passage, Mark does not record any of his male followers visiting the tomb three days after his death. So even this theory doesn't seem to hold its weight. His followers thought he had died. They wouldn't go through the trouble to steal his body.

Despite the failure of people to disprove the resurrection, people persist in their disbelief. It's not hard to see why. **People do not believe in the resurrection because they see thing decay**. If we look at things around us, then we'll see that things will die. Think about your loved ones. Their once nimble bodies slow down. Their minds dull over time.

Eventually, death will claim their lives. Think about your beloved possessions. Your new car will eventually be a rust heap at the local junk yard. Your new phone will eventually sit in a pile of other old phones awaiting disposal. Your beloved dog that you brought home as a puppy will slow down and eventually die. Death seems to be destiny of all things. It prompts people not to believe in the resurrection. It's unbelievable.

Let's move onto the second part of the message. The testimony. The testimony of these women says that **the resurrection is true**. Jesus did rise from the dead. He, who was crucified, has returned to live. Jesus did not remain lifeless. He returned to live. **The resurrection is true**.

Mark explains that the resurrection is true. We see this in the details he records of the resurrection account of today's passage.

First, **the stone is rolled away for the women to see into the tomb**. Look again at verse 4. *And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back – it was very large*. God removed the stone allowing the women to enter the tomb.

Second, the women encounter a young man. **The young man informs the women that Jesus had risen**. Look at verse 5. *And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. And he said to them, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him*.

Mark describes a young man at key moments of Jesus's betrayal and now at his resurrection. But this young man doesn't seem human from the description. First, he wears

a white robe. Mark uses the word white to describe the garments of Jesus at his transfiguration (Mark 9:3). It would indicate that this young man had heavenly origins. Second, the women feel alarmed at his presence. In the gospels, we see that only angelic beings cause humans to experience alarm. Third, angels appear sometimes in human form. For example, angels appear to Abraham in human form before they judge the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 18:2). They also appear to Lot in human form (Gen 19:1-11). For these reasons, it's likely that the young man is an angelic messenger. This angel in the form of a young man informs the three women that the body of Jesus is no longer in the tomb. Jesus had risen.

There's a third detail that instructs us that Jesus had risen from the dead. **Jesus fulfilled his predictions about his death and resurrection.** Look at verse 7. *But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.* Prior to Jesus's betrayal and crucifixion, he had predicted his death and resurrection three times (Mark 8:31; 9:30-31; 10:33). He also informs the disciples after the Lord's supper that he will rise from the dead and go to Galilee (Mark 14:48). Jesus knew that he was going to die and rise again. Someone once said: "If someone can predict his death and resurrection and pull it off, then he is worthy of my devotion". Jesus not only predicted his death and resurrection, but he accomplished it.

There's one last detail that proves the resurrection to be true. The women served as witnesses to the empty tomb. In the first century, only the testimony of men was valid in court. Celus, a Greek philosopher who lived in the second century A.D, opposed Christianity. One argument he made is that "Christianity can't be true, because the written

accounts of the resurrection are based on the testimony of women – and we all know that women are hysterical" (Keller, 237). In other words, if the early followers of Christ wanted to fabricate the resurrection of Jesus, then they would have used men as their primary eyewitnesses. The resurrection of Jesus must be true because Mark and the other gospel authors record the women as the first eyewitnesses to the resurrection.

Based upon these details, the removal of the stone, the message of the young men, the fulfilment of Jesus's predictions of his death and resurrection, and the witness of these women, it demonstrates that the resurrection is true. Since the resurrection is true, it proves that Jesus had accomplished his mission. What was his mission? Jesus explains to James and John before entering Jerusalem that "*the Son of Man came not be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many"* (Mark 10:45). This means that Jesus through his death and resurrection provides salvation for those who believe.

As Christians, we believe that we were created to be relationship with God. But our inability to live according to God's will caused us to experience separation from Him. We call this inability to live according to God's will sin. The consequence of sin is death. That's why all of us will experience a physical death. Our physical bodies are separated from life. But sin also results in a spiritual death. We will experience separation from God forever. But Jesus died on the cross to pay the punishment we deserve. Note the last words of Jesus in the gospel: "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" (Mark 15:34). Jesus experienced the separation that we deserve so that we could receive his perfect life. In other words, a great exchange occurred that the cross. Jesus took on our sin. We took on his righteousness. But the question one ought to ask at the cross is "How do we know that it

worked? How do we know that God accepted Jesus's death?" If Jesus stayed dead, then we would never know if Jesus's death saved us from our sin. This requires Jesus to rise from the dead. In other words, Jesus rising from the dead means that he had conquered sin and death. He succeeded in restoring our relationship with God. That's why the resurrection is critical to our Christian faith.

Let's continue to the last part of today's message. The implications. If the resurrection is true, then **we must follow Jesus on the pathway of discipleship**. To follow Jesus means living according to his instructions. We must live our lives so that it resembles Christ. Following Jesus means allowing God to conform us into the image of Christ. **We must follow Jesus on the pathway of discipleship.**

Mark composes his ending to invite readers onto the pathway of discipleship. In our church, we try to make a distinction between the two words: discipling and discipleship. Discipling describes how someone might mentor another believer in the Christian faith. They meet up to edify one another. Discipleship, on the other hand, describes how we follow Christ. To grow in our discipleship means that we grow in our obedience to God. Not all believers may be in a discipling relationship, but all believers should be growing in their discipleship.

Throughout the gospel of Mark, we see Jesus inviting people to follow Him. He invites Bartimaeus and others to follow him on the way. Mark threads the theme of discipleship through his gospel account. So, it is no surprise that Mark concludes his gospel with an invitation to discipleship.

Now I confess that I used to prefer the other gospel accounts to Mark because their resurrection accounts seemed a little bit more helpful. In the gospel of Mark, Jesus doesn't make a resurrection appearance. All we are left with is an empty tomb. It seemed anticlimactic to me. One might even say I felt a little down reading the ending to Mark. But being a little older and a little wiser, I've grown to appreciate the ending of Mark. Let me share why I appreciate the end of Mark's gospel.

First, **Mark recognizes that the followers of Jesus will fail when they follow Him**. Why do I say this?

The disciples and Peter are absent from the resurrection. Despite seeing Jesus restore the sight of the blind. Despite seeing Jesus cleansing a person from leprosy. Despite seeing Jesus calm a storm. Despite sitting under Jesus's teaching. Despite hearing Jesus predicting his death and resurrection. They did not believe. They didn't even think to go to the tomb to see if maybe Jesus might make good on his word to rise from the dead. Instead, they abandoned him.

Now one might think that three women did better than the disciples. But the text doesn't paint them in a good light either. For example, the word "seek" in verse 6: *You seek Jesus of Nazareth* is used in negative contexts within the gospel of Mark. The family of Jesus sought him out to obstruct his ministry. The religious leaders sought Jesus to end his ministry and eventually to kill him. Mark might use the word to criticize the women for seeking a dead Jesus rather than a resurrected Jesus.

But there's an even more glaring failure. **Mark depicts the women's failure to carry out the young man's instruction**. Look at verse 8. *And they went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone for they were afraid*. The young man instructed the women to inform the disciples; the women did the opposite. I don't know if you all remember, but throughout the gospel of Mark, Jesus instructed people not to disclose his identity or his mission (Mark 1:25, 43). But the young man on behalf of Jesus finally gives the women permission to disclose the resurrection to the world, they keep silent.

But why does Mark record the failures of the disciples and these women? **Mark records the failures to show that God will carry out his will despite the failure of his people**. In other words, God doesn't call perfect people to follow him. He calls people who will stumble in their obedience to follow him. God seems to have a track record of using flawed people to accomplish his purposes. Think about Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. All of them failed along the way, but God still used them to accomplish his purposes. This is the hope of the resurrection.

If God can bring Jesus back to life from the dead, then God can also to bring out of the ashes of hopes, dreams, broken relationships something better. We follow a God who can use all circumstances good and bad to bring about his good purposes.

Although Mark records the failure of the women, the women do overcome their failure. **They inform the disciples that Jesus had risen from the dead**. The other gospel accounts record their interactions with the disciples.

The disciples also despite their failure encounter the risen Jesus. Jesus restores them and sends them out as his messengers. **The disciples faithfully proclaim the gospel to the ends of the earth**.

What does this mean for us? It means **despite our failure, God invites us to join Him again to follow him**. He says to us: "Yes. I know you have not obeyed me in these areas. But I'm inviting you again to follow me." We see this invitation in the text.

The young man instructs the women to go to Galilee. Look again at verse 7: *But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee*. Why will Jesus meet the disciples and women in Galilee? Remember where the ministry of Jesus begins. It began in the region of Galilee, the northern part of Israel. Who did he invite to follow him in Galilee? Peter (Mark 1:18). His disciples. Mark references the area of Galilee as an invitation. Will we the readers considering the news of the resurrection follow Jesus? Just like his first disciples, will we accept his invitation to be fishers of men?

If we believe in the resurrection. If we believe that Jesus rose from the dead, then we must follow Jesus on the pathway to discipleship. For those of you who do not consider Jesus as your Lord and savior, then consider today's message as invitation to belief. Mark records in the beginning of his gospel Jesus's message: "Repent and believe in the gospel" (1:15). **Believe that Jesus died on the cross for your sins and rose again**.

For those of you identify as followers of Christ, **follow him by denying yourself and pursuing his will**. Jesus says: "*If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me*" (Mark 8:34). The power that causes Jesus to rise from the

dead resides in you through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit enables you to overcome difficult things in your life – your fears, your anxieties, your broken relationships, and your bitterness. Will you decide to follow Jesus and experience the power of resurrection in these areas of your life? Even if you have wandered from God from a season. If you have spent time in the far country as a prodigal. If you have decided to live according to your flesh. God invites you to follow him again. He beckons to you: join him in Galilee. Return to Him and follow Him anew.

Let me summarize the message for us. **Some believe that the resurrection is untrue, but the resurrection is true, so we must follow Jesus on the pathway of fellowship**. Since we believe in the resurrection, we must follow Him.

In 2009, a retired minister of the First Unitarian Church of Portland Oregon, interviewed Christpher Hitchens, a famous atheist. Unitarians do not believe in the trinity or hell or literal resurrection. Let me read to you an excerpt from the interview.

The interviewer asked Christopher Hitchens this question: The religion you cite in your book is generally the fundamentalist faith of various kinds. I'm a liberal Christian, and I don't take the stories from the scripture literally. I don't believe in the doctrine of atonement (that Jesus died for our sins, for example). Do you make any distinction between fundamentalist faith and liberal religion?

Listen to Hitchen's response: I would say that if you don't believe that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ and Messiah, and that he rose again from the dead and by his sacrifice our sins are forgiven, you're really not in any meaningful sense a Christian. If an

atheist understood the importance of the resurrection to the Christian faith, then shouldn't we who follow Jesus also acknowledge the importance of the resurrection even more? Shouldn't belief in the resurrection also compel us to follow Him? May it be so among us.