

We are in our 53rd and final week in the Gospel of Mark. I'm privileged to be able to wrap up the Book of Mark. As I was thinking about this, I was thinking we are bombarded with so much information. It's information that is thrust upon us or information we get as we get lost in ourselves and our pursuits. It just comes from all over. And it's fairly new to the human experience. The level of information that we have and how we can focus so much of our attention on it.

I know so much about trivial things that I've scanned or scrolled through in the last 24 hours. I know more about the injuries of my favorite athletes and whether they're going to be ready for the game or not than I really should know. It comes at us. We consume it passively. Somebody said that we know everything about the last 24 hours, considerably less about the last 24 years, and next to nothing about the last 2,400 years. We're wise to ask ourselves what we should be paying attention to. What should I be focused on? What actually matters? And this morning, I would suggest that the event here in Mark that happened around 2000 years ago, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is one of the things we must focus our mind on for our own good.

Around 2000 years ago, the resurrection of Jesus occurred, and the historical event continues to divide history in a way that nothing else ever has. The world is radically different because of what Christ did, what he taught, what he claimed about himself, that he was God. It is radically different because of the message his followers preached that Jesus truly died, was buried, and rose again. That salvation and forgiveness of sins is available through Jesus.

You know, there's a lot of stories in the Bible that end with a big bang. And we love those stories. The walls of Jericho come tumbling down. The Israelites narrowly escape the Egyptians as they're fleeing because God opens the Red Sea, and they walk on dry land to safety as walls of water are around them. The teenager David just clocks Goliath. We love those kinds of stories because they're memorable, they're full of action, and they're stories of triumph. As we've been through these 15 chapters of the Gospel of Mark, we love it because it is rapid fire, it is full of action, and

it just seems so efficiently written. Mark gets to the point.

When we look at the story of the resurrection in Matthew, Luke, or John, we see a story that seems complete. We're satisfied that when we read about Jesus' post-resurrection appearances and his final teachings, including the Great Commission, and then we imagine what it must have been like to watch him ascend up into heaven, we feel that the story is complete. The tension of his death is resolved.

But Mark ends his gospel in a very different way from the other gospel writers. Did you catch it? *"Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid"* (Mark 16:8). The end. Really? I mean, he ends his gospel with the words, trembling, bewildered, fled, and afraid. Why, in heaven's name, would Mark end his gospel with the words, "because they were afraid?" We have seen Mark's style throughout the story. A good word for his style is terse. But his ending is really terse.

It's like Mark drops the mic and walks off the stage. You read this, and you can't help but wonder, is something not right here? It just doesn't seem to be filled out. Did he really intend to do this? Or did he get writer's block? Did he run out of papyrus or ink in his writing? Or, you know, did he die? Was he unable to complete his story? Because why isn't there a happier, more satisfying ending here? And you wonder if some monk, a copyist in a seminary in the Dark Ages, kind of messed it up as he was recording and making sure we had the scriptures throughout all history.

I thought about all the Easter sermons that I've preached on the resurrection over the years; I have never once selected Mark 16:1-8. God has his perfect reason for including Mark and this abrupt ending. So, let's open our hearts this morning. I titled this sermon "The Amazing Jesus."

Let's open our hearts to this amazing Jesus and let his resurrection shape our actions and our thoughts throughout our lives, and not let the importance of the resurrection get lost amidst all the noise that's going on in the clutter of our 21st-century lives. Before we

dive in, let's look at what Paul tells us about the implications to us if Christ did not rise from the dead. In 1 Corinthians 15:14, he says, "And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith." So, if Jesus was not raised, there is no Christian faith. If there's no resurrection, we might as well just turn off the lights and go home. Jesus would be nothing more than another person, albeit a very good, profound person, who tragically died on a cross. And if Jesus did not rise first, there would be no resurrection for any of us. There would be no hope for our future resurrection.

Our faith is useless if it is not grounded in the historical fact of Jesus' resurrection. Paul says in verse 17, "And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins." So if there's no resurrection, our faith, no matter how pure it might be, is in vain. And no matter how grand our faith might be, if there is no resurrection when we die, we are dead and buried, and that's it. And if Jesus didn't rise from the dead, that means that he did not pay for our sins. Sin would have won. Death would have won. He would have been defeated on the cross. And we would still be facing the penalty of our own sins if Jesus had not risen from the dead.

But Paul says there's good news. Jesus did rise from the dead, and instead of losing everything, the resurrection changed everything.

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man." vv. 20-21

So, a key idea here is that Jesus' resurrection is the key to our future resurrection. So now let's look at the historical event through the eyes of Mark. "When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body (Mark 16:1). Remember from last week, as Kevin taught us, Jesus died on Friday. According to the Jewish tradition, the body was to be buried immediately.

The tradition was that you didn't burn bodies, you didn't embalm bodies. And so likely, Joseph of Arimathea, along with Nicodemus, quickly prepared Jesus' body for burial. His arms, his legs, and his torso were wrapped in long strips of cloth. And then there was a separate head cloth that was placed, like a turban, over his head. And the tradition called for sweet smelling spices, lots of spices, to be poured over

the body. They would anoint the body with spices for burial. Maybe up to a hundred pounds of spices might be used on a body.

Well, why these spices? Because the spices were to cover the smell of a decomposing body. But Jesus needed to be buried quickly because the Sabbath was the next day, so they weren't allowed to do the work of burial on the Sabbath according to tradition. If they waited until after the Sabbath to bury Jesus and put him in the tomb, it would already be decomposing. Jesus' body was never anointed for burial right after he died. As a final act of love and devotion, what these women wanted to do was, out of their love for him, properly anoint Jesus' body with the spices that they bought and bury him according to tradition.

If you remember, though, back in chapter 14, when Jesus was in Bethany, reclined at a table, the table of Simon, the leper, and another Mary came into the room, probably Mary, the sister of Martha, who lived in Bethany. She came in and broke that jar of expensive perfume and poured it on him. Remember what happened? The disciples ridiculed Mary because they thought that she was wasting money that could have been used for the poor. What did Jesus say to them? He told them to leave Mary alone. He said that they would always have the poor among them. Mary had done a beautiful thing. She has poured the perfume on his body to prepare for his burial. So he was anointed for burial just prior, back in chapter 14.

We pick up the story here. The sun goes down on Saturday night. The Sabbath is officially over. The women went, bought their spices as planned, and then their plan was to get up early in the morning on Sunday and go to the tomb. What we're going to see here is that the empty tomb is one of the strongest pieces of evidence for the resurrection.

Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?" vv. 2-3

At this point in the story, as I was studying this, I had a big question. Where are all the men? Where did they go? Remember, they were afraid, and what did they do? They scattered at the crucifixion. They're probably hiding behind some locked door somewhere. And what do these women do? These women courageously stepped out into the public; they freely associated themselves with Jesus, fearlessly going into the public, and they were actually planning to ask

someone to help them roll away the stone so they could get inside to anoint Jesus' body.

It's fascinating how the Holy Spirit orchestrates this because if we were making up the story to be the most credible, to put forth a believable theory that Jesus had risen from the dead, we would have never written women into the story, because the culture of the day would not allow a woman's eyewitness testimony to be valid. God orchestrates that these loving, kind, and brave women who were changed by Jesus to have the most prominent role in delivering the message of the greatest miracle in history.

So the women went very early on the first day of the week, Sunday. And Jesus rose from the dead that first day of the week on Sunday. That's really our tradition, why we worship together on the first day of the week. Jesus was resurrected on Sunday. Some of you may come from traditions where you worship on Saturday, the sixth day of the week, and that's fine. What I'm focusing on is that I want to be worshipful seven days a week, but I want to come together with the family I love on the first day of the week.

Here's the problem they had now. There was this stone that was sealing the entrance of the tomb, and it wasn't a small problem. It was a one to two-ton problem that they had. Unless someone moves the stone, they will fail in their mission. So understand that for these women and the disciples, there was no thought here about ever seeing Jesus alive again. Jesus was dead. He was buried. He was sealed in a tomb. The idea of him being alive was just not on their radar. *"But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away"* (v. 4). So, that just creates another level of stress for these women; why has this been rolled away? Who did this without them asking? Who's controlling this? The stone was moved away; is the body still there? Did somebody vandalize his burial place? Did somebody steal the body? Why was the stone rolled away?

Well, it wasn't rolled away to let Jesus out. Remember, he could go through walls. The stone was rolled away to let the women in. *"As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed"* (v.5). The Greek word translated alarmed here is rarely used. Mark uses the same word to describe the distress to the point of death that Jesus experienced in the Garden of Gethsemane the night he was arrested. It's a compound word that means strong emotion combined with fear and

agitation. So the women entered the tomb, and they saw something that freaked them out.

There was no body in the tomb. Then they looked to the right, and they saw where Jesus' head would have been laid. They saw a young man in a white robe. Matthew describes it as a great earthquake occurring in the early morning hours as an angel descended from heaven and single-handedly rolled back the two-ton stone. If you remember, there were Roman soldiers also guarding the tomb, and they saw this angel. Matthew says his appearance was like lightning, his clothing white as snow, and the guards trembled, and they fainted. They became like dead men.

So maybe an hour later, maybe two hours later, the soldiers revived and were gone, probably running for their lives, knowing that they had, in terms of Roman law, committed an unpardonable sin by letting the stone get rolled away, and the body's gone.

In scripture, it just seems like most of the time, when people see an angel, their first response is alarm. Not only is there an empty tomb as evidence of the resurrection, the angel here is further evidence of the resurrection. "Don't be alarmed," the angel said. In scripture, when people encounter angels, they usually freak out. Angels seem to be always saying, don't be afraid or fear not.

I believe we encounter angels a lot more often than we think. The writer of Hebrews describes angels as ministering servants sent from heaven to minister to believers in Christ for salvation. How beautiful is that? And I believe angels have likely visited almost everyone here at some point or another, and we probably didn't even know it. Maybe sometimes we did. I bet there are some great angel stories that would come out from this crowd that's gathered here today. Hebrews 13:2, the writer says, *"Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it."* So, in this angel encounter, the angel is saying to the woman, "I know you are freaked out; don't be freaked out."

Then he said, *"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"* (v. 6). It's common in Greek to use one powerful word and sometimes in English it takes several words to say the same thing. But the word that he used is in the past tense, which means it was a past action. But it's also said, and I haven't caught this before until I study this deeper here, the passive voice, which means that Jesus was raised. He didn't raise himself; he was dead.

Mark doesn't want to suggest that Jesus came back to life on his own. He was raised by a power, the power of God outside of himself. Jesus had been raised by God.

There's no greater miracle we can ever think of than the bodily resurrection of a dead person. In the book of Acts, the early sermons that were preached by the apostles all go back to the resurrection of Jesus. He didn't stay dead. He only needed to borrow the tomb. He only needed to borrow it for a weekend. That was it.

So what did the angels want the women to "see"? He wanted them to see nothing. Jesus was not there. The word used for "see" means to study this, contemplate this. The angel is saying to perceive what it means. Take your time. We're not sure how long the women were looking and studying this and processing all of this as they looked hard into what was happening, but eventually, the angel told them to go. The angels gave them a mission, and it wasn't to anoint a corpse. Their mission was to go.

"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'" (v. 7). So, back in Mark 14:28, Jesus said to his disciples in the third prediction of his death, "But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee." The women are instructed to tell the disciples and Peter to meet the resurrected Jesus in Galilee.

We have this empty tomb as evidence, we have angels as evidence, and clearly, the next one is we have eyewitness evidence for the resurrection. Peter, John, the rest of the apostles, and these women. But then you ask as you look at this, did the women actually tell the disciples and Peter? *"Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid" (v. 8).* Trembling the idea that their bodies physically were trembling at this whole amazing event affecting them physically. And this word bewildered could mean heightened emotions. Everything was on edge with them. They were in a heightened state, highly attentive, I'm sure. So they said nothing to anyone because they were afraid.

This abrupt ending leaves us wanting more. It leaves us wanting a resolution to this tension instead of ending with, they were afraid. As we've referred to, Matthew, Luke, and John resolve that tension in their gospels. They write that Jesus appeared later, soon after, to the women. And then the women were confident at

that point, and they told everything to the apostles. Then Peter and John raced back to the tomb to see for themselves. There were the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, where Jesus explained all of this to them. And then there were these appearances to the rest of the apostles. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul writes that Jesus appeared to over 500 brothers and sisters at one time before he ascended up to heaven.

If your Bible is like mine, after verse 8, you have some bracketed italicized verses 9 through 20. Here at CPC, we generally use the New International Version, which is considered by scholars to be excellent and accurate. There are other excellent and accurate translations as well, but I want to take a moment to address the italicized verses. There is a disclaimer, a type of product warning label, you might call it. It says that some of the earliest manuscripts do not include these verses. What verses? Verses 9 through 20.

Now it may surprise some of you if you think about that question, how did we get our Bible? Studying how we came up with our canon was one of my favorite classes in seminary. How is it decided? Who did this? How did the Holy Spirit orchestrate all this to get us such an accurate Bible?

Think about it for a moment. Think about paper or papyrus; whatever they used didn't last forever. It deteriorates. So, they had to keep copying manuscripts. Generation after generation of dedicated copyists preserved what we have in terms of our Bible today. And the church has thousands of copies from very old, very reliable manuscripts. That idea of textual criticism that we learned in seminary is a science of assessing the reliability of these manuscripts. They determine which ones are the most reliable. A great commentator back in the early 20th century, A. T. Robertson, writes, "We should not worry today in our modern English translations. We are 99.9 percent accurate in what we have today."

These hand-copied Bibles continued throughout history up until the Gutenberg printing press, which was in the 15th century. In these next couple of minutes, I'm going to go Indiana Jones on you. Most scholars believe that in the second century, a copyist was probably frustrated with Mark's cliff-hanging ending in verse 8, and he took other scriptures and formed a more satisfying, and full ending to Mark.

It's not that this added ending, which you can read by yourselves later, wasn't full of truth. It is full of truth. It's just believed that it wasn't written by Mark. It

wasn't Mark's style. The tense changes are abrupt. The syntax is different. There are 18 words that are used in those last verses that Mark never used throughout his gospel. It just wasn't his style. Scholars didn't want another writer to put anything under the signature of Mark. It was Mark's gospel. So the argument wasn't if it was true or not. The argument was whether it was written by Mark or not. And if they determined that it wasn't Mark, it shouldn't be included in his gospel.

The Codex Sinaiticus was discovered at the foot of Mount Sinai in 1844. It's a complete copy of the entire Bible translated into ancient Greek, dating back to AD 350. It's considered the world's oldest Bible, and in this ancient manuscript, this oldest Bible verses 9 through 20 do not appear. There's also another manuscript called the Codex Vaticanus, which is the oldest manuscript on record. It's almost the whole Bible and it dates back to AD 325. It was discovered in the Vatican Library in 1475. And in this ancient manuscript of Mark, Mark 16 also ends at verse 8.

So the Bible we use this morning is based on the oldest, most reliable manuscripts, the Sinaiticus and the Vaticanus, copied over and over again century after century by dedicated monks, probably in monasteries during the dark ages, during the medieval age. And one of them thought that Mark needed an added ending. And I'm not going to take the time to read verses 9 through 20; we purposely didn't read it, but it does align well with scriptural truth. Well, there are a couple of wonky things about handling snakes and poison, but you know, I'm not going to get into that either.

The writing actually has four main points. The church has a preaching task, a healing task; The church has a source of power—the Holy Spirit, and the church has Christ forever and ever, amen. That's the gist of what those additional words say. I like to read those verses and think of them as there's this well-meaning, second-century monk who wanted to write a happy ending to Mark.

I like Mark's ending at verse 8, because it's the way he wrote his whole gospel. Mark doesn't start with Jesus' birth; he starts with his baptism. He quickly moves from one scene after another, leaving people astonished, leaving people amazed, leaving people fearful, leaving people terrified. It's what Mark wants to get across to us, in that there is a proper response to this amazing Jesus.

For example, in Mark 1:22, the people were amazed at Jesus' teaching way back 52 sermons ago. They

were so amazed they asked each other, "What is this? A new teaching, and it's with authority." Mark 2:12, The man got up and picked up his mat and walked, and this amazed everyone. Mark 4:41, after Jesus calmed the storm, the disciples were terrified. Mark 5:15, the demon possessed man was healed, and the people were afraid. Mark 5:33, the woman who was bleeding for 12 years was healed, and she trembled with fear. Mark 5:42, Jesus raises the little girl from the dead, and the disciples are completely astonished. Mark 6:51, Jesus walks on water, and the disciples are terrified, and then they are amazed. Mark 9:6, Peter, James, and John saw Jesus, Moses, and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration, and they were frightened. Mark 9:15, as soon as the people saw Jesus heal the demon possessed boy, they were overwhelmed with wonder. Mark 10:24, the disciples were amazed again at Jesus' teaching. Mark 10:32, Jesus predicted his death for the third time, and the disciples were astonished. Mark 11:18, the chief priests and the teachers of the law began to look for a way to kill Jesus because they feared him. Mark 12:17, Jesus said to give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's and they were amazed at him. Mark 15:5, Jesus stood before Pilate, and Pilate was amazed. And then, in Mark 16:05, after witnessing the angel in the empty tomb and Jesus' resurrection, the women were alarmed, trembling, bewildered, and afraid.

I titled the message today "The Amazing Jesus," and I want to end with a question. Are you amazed? That's what Mark wants to get across here. Jesus is the Son of God. Be amazed at this man. I've been a Christian for 45 years, and as I was preparing this week, I was like, "Thank you, Lord. I'm still amazed." As I seek to surrender my life to him and follow him, Mark is proving this point. He's making a point. It's like then Mark is out, drops the mic, leaves the stage. It's a good lesson for long-winded preachers!

The story of the resurrection is not just good news; it's true news. Jesus says in John, "I am the resurrection and the life, and whoever believes in me will not die." And this isn't just some metaphor, some vague hope. It means that death has no power to take you away from the secure place you have as a child of God. No matter what happens, that place is secure while we are here on earth.

It also means that God has secured a future place. It means for us as children of God we will be resurrected with him for all of eternity. It means that in a season when your faith may be weak and in those times

when you struggle with your flesh, in your mess-ups, in your guilt, in your sorrow, those cannot separate you from the love of God. It means whatever bad news you face, no matter what tough situation you're in, if you trusted Jesus Christ as your Savior, you have trusted Jesus to be your resurrection and life, and you know that resurrection is coming.

Josh McDowell said this, "No matter how devastating our struggles, disappointments, and troubles are, they are only temporary." No matter what happens to you, no matter the depth of tragedy or pain you face, no matter how death stalks you and your loved ones, the resurrection promises you a future of immeasurable good.

Few people seem to realize that the resurrection of Jesus is the cornerstone to a worldview that provides perspective to all of life. Thank you, Jesus. You are amazing. Thank you for giving us Mark's gospel so we can follow you more closely because of what we've learned and walk in the power and victory of Jesus because we have a resurrection coming. I'm sure there are many of us who are struggling right now and just need to be reminded of the hope of the resurrection.

To the elderly person who's here today, or maybe listening online from your bed, and your health is frail, almost gone, you don't have to live in fear. You have a resurrection coming. To the husband or wife who's in a broken marriage, feeling abandoned, not loved, wounded. You don't have to live without hope. You have a resurrection coming. To parents who are here with struggling children or depressed, anxious, maybe rebellious, you don't have to live burdened by worry or blame yourself; his mercies are new every morning. You have a resurrection coming. To any who are unemployed in our family, you can place your confidence in God as you seek his direction for your next step, confident that no matter what, you have a resurrection coming. To those who struggle with addiction, maybe even hiding in plain sight, hold on tight because you have a resurrection coming. To maybe a young adult who's here, the job brought you to the Bay Area, and you're longing for community, longing to be loved; God will never leave you. Rest in the reality that you have a resurrection coming. To all who are students listening this morning. You don't have to feel the pressure to perform on that final exam

because the most important news is not what you accomplished but what God has accomplished for you. Rest in the fact that no matter what happens on that next test, you have a resurrection coming.

Lord, thank you that you are full of grace, full of mercy, and power. Victory is found in you. Thank you for the fact that we worship an amazing Jesus and we live today in the reality of resurrection. We have nothing to fear because the resurrection is coming. May we walk away and say goodbye to our Mark series amazed. Amen.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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