

Mark 16:1-8

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Date: 09 April 2023

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[0 : 00] Christ is risen. He is risen indeed.! I discovered recently about a man called Harry Meadows.! Harry Meadows spent 87 years of his life unknown,! unreported in the paper or TV or anywhere else.

He was in a home for the elderly, for lots of old folk in Great Yarmouth. Harry Meadows got a bit bored. So he rented a costume, a fancy dress costume.

He rented a Grim Reaper costume. And Harry Meadows accessed a scythe for cutting things down and he thought he'd have some innocent fun in the old people's home.

He stood outside tapping the windows of some of the old people in his costume, peering in from the outside. And then according to the press, so it's got to be true, three people died.

Now there's a practical joke that's gone wrong, isn't it? There were a few other shenanigans in that old people's home in Great Yarmouth and then it was shut down. Not all publicity is good publicity.

[1 : 10] And as you've heard already this morning as I read it, it's an unusual thing, isn't it, that Christianity is born in a cemetery. It's a very unusual thing for good news to come trumping out of a graveyard.

But that's the claim of the first witnesses, the first Christians who wrote down their accounts. That Christianity is birthed and understood as coming out of a cemetery.

Three words in Mark 16 verse 6. Can you see them? He has risen. He has risen, this young man says.

Is that true or is that simply a lie? Now some people might say, well it's a nice lie. I'm not sure it is a nice lie. The trouble is that statement has caused huge, huge issues, huge problems.

Many hundreds and hundreds, hundreds of thousands of people have died for that statement. He has risen. They believed it to be true that Christ rose from the dead. Is it fake news?

[2 : 20] Or is it true and serious good and happy news? Professor Josh McDowell said that after more than 700 years of studying this subject, I've come to the conclusion that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is either one of the most wicked, vicious, heartless hoaxes ever fostered on the minds of human beings, or it is the most remarkable fact in history.

And I think he's right. It's one or the other. It's not a nice myth. It's either true or false. Blaise Pascal, a mathematician, said either the disciples of Jesus were deceived or deceivers, or it's true.

Well let's look at Mark 16. Matthew, Luke and John have got more substance to their stories, more details. And Mark is very brief, isn't he? He just ate verses. And you may have noticed that when it was read, there's not an account of Jesus appearing in Mark 16.

It's the promise that he will soon after appear. It's unusual, Mark 16. It's intriguing. We're meant to feel quizzical at the end of Mark's gospel.

And so today's sermon is brought to you by the letter R. All right? And so firstly, we're looking at somebody who is risen. Who is risen.

[3 : 42] It's the backbone of Christianity. The cross and resurrection make up this powerful message that's been changing lives all around the world.

And here today, all over the globe, he has risen. And the resurrection is the backbone of it all. It's not a happy ending to a sad story or an epilogue that you could do without.

It really is the climax and the destination of the whole thing. If this ain't true, the whole story is rubbish. And what we're doing here is a waste of time, perhaps worse.

The early Christians saw this. There's a hard-headedness about real Christianity. And so Jesus asks us twice, we have reckoned, give us proof that you say who you are.

And both times in Matthew and in John, he refers to his resurrection. That'll be the proof, he says. The Apostle Paul, who was the first organizer of persecutions of Christians, wrote about 25 years

after Jesus' death and resurrection.

[4 : 47] And he says, if Christ had not been raised, we would be, well, people to be pitied. If Christ had not been raised, our faith is worthless. And you're still in your sins. We're going to hear more about that tonight.

If Christ had not been raised, we're liars. But here we have a messenger in a tomb saying, he has risen.

And he says it to the women. And you might have noticed, as you've gone through the accounts of the last few days, if you're familiar with the Gospels, that women are mentioned at the cross, and the burial, and the empty tomb.

And people have rightly noted that the men, at the end of the Gospels, have been marked failures. Perhaps John was at the cross, but all the other disciples are hiding.

And when the women finally find the men on Resurrection Sunday, the men are in a locked room. They're not out doing anything other than trying to stay safe.

[5 : 50] And the women are the only ones publicly identifying with Jesus. It's the women who go to the tomb. Sincis was a Greek philosopher.

He hated Christianity, and he studied it to attack it. He wrote a book outlining why he thought Christianity was rubbish. And one of the things that he said was that it was based on the gossip of women.

It varied in different parts of the Empire, but generally speaking, in some parts of the Roman Empire, women couldn't even witness in court. It's a bit like today, making up a story and having four-year-olds as your key witness.

No one making up a story in Jesus' day would have had the key witnesses as women. It's an embarrassment. It was used against Christians. And so here are these women.

They are heading off to the tomb. They're in the midst of grief and sorrow. They're not thinking there's been a resurrection. In the same way that you and I would go to a gravesite and lay flowers on a fresh grave.

[7 : 01] And as they walk to the tomb, for a moment they think, remember there's a great rock in front of the tomb. The rock would have weighed probably as much as a minibus would have, but it wouldn't have had wheels which were rubber.

And so how are you going to get into the tomb? The women have got spices to finish the burial process, but when they get there, the stone has already been moved, and so they go and they have a look.

I don't think the stone was removed to let Jesus out. It was removed to let people in so that they could see. And so slightly terrified, they walk into this tomb, and there is a man, a young man, who we know from other passages, passages from other gospel accounts, is an angel.

The word angel just means messenger. And the angel says to them, can you see what he says? He says, verse 6, do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified.

That's really helpful. It's really helpful because it indicates that he knows what they're looking for.

That they're looking for Jesus, and there's two features about him.

[8 : 16] We're told that this Jesus they were looking for, he's from Nazareth, and he was crucified. That tells you where he's from, and what did he do?

And what's the main thing he does? He is crucified. That's the truth about the Lord Jesus Christ. He was born to die. He came into this world to save sinners like you and I.

You are born to live, aren't you? You're born to live. Sadly, you do die, though. But Jesus was born to die.

He says he was crucified. The messenger knows why he was there. And what's the next thing? He is risen. And quite literally, it says he was crucified, and then the next word is risen.

It's very blunt. The crucified one has become the risen one. And those are the two things to know about Jesus. Both are true historically. Both happened.

[9 : 24] And what the angel then says is, this messenger, he says, you are going to see him. Go back, tell the disciples that you'll see him in Galilee.

He's going ahead of you. And the word would be used of a military leader, a military leader who would be sent in front of the army, and he would be there preparing the way.

He's going ahead of you, and you will meet up with him there in Galilee. That's where you'll see him. All the other Gospels have accounts of the disciples meeting him.

There are accounts of people who didn't become believers in the resurrection, and they met him. It's a very important thing that Christ is risen bodily.

He didn't rise so that he would have a spiritual kind of influence on you. The word resurrection literally means standing up. It is the standing up of a corpse.

[10 : 35] It's crystal clear that the resurrection of Jesus is not about an ongoing spiritual influence on him, on you, because the messenger says, doesn't he, he is risen, he is not here.

See the place where they laid him. The body is gone. You might not like that. You might not be interested in that. You might think that's a little bit creepy.

But what it's saying to you is that God is absolutely committed to his creation. The promise of the Bible is the promise of a new body in a new heavens and a new earth.

And Jesus is the first fruit. He is the taster, if I can put it like that. That is where he is gone. And so is Jesus risen?

Or isn't he? Is it just a filthy lie? I read this week that the shortest sermon, and you see I do try, the sermon title was called Killing Jesus.

[11 : 47] That was the heading of the sermon. And the sermon went, didn't work. It's not a great sermon. The sermon title should have been Getting Rid of Jesus.

And you could say that didn't work because Jesus really did die. The Romans killed hundreds of thousands of people by crucifixion.

And they killed so many people by crucifixion that there were no trees left outside Jerusalem. It was a nightmare. Now let me say Jesus' resurrection matters because it is impossible.

The one thing that we know about you and the one thing you know about me and the one thing that you know about everyone you love and care about and everyone who is famous and worthwhile and everyone who is a loser and has done great harm is that we all die.

So people will say to you no one can come back from the dead. Absolutely. That's absolutely the case. The one thing we know is that in the end we all get beaten by death.

[12 : 55] That's why we don't talk about it in our culture do we? Because we've got no answer for it. But what this is saying is no, no, no. There is one person who said that he would defeat death and then has left us very good evidence that he did.

And I don't mean it to be rude but there is simply no one else who makes this claim. Jews don't suggest do they that Moses defeated death.

Muslims don't suggest that Muhammad defeated death. Buddhists don't claim that Buddha defeated death. It's actually a very unusual claim and yet there's very strong evidence for it.

In fact if you've never had the chance to look at the evidence there are books there are films which can give you the evidence. Some books have been written where the author has set out deliberately to debunk and disprove the resurrection and ended up writing a book in support of the resurrection.

So convincing has been the evidence. They found it overwhelming. The evidence is not very strong though if you haven't looked for it. it's not very strong if you haven't looked at it which is true of most people.

[14 : 11] He is risen. Either that or the whole of Christianity is a filthy lie. The second R is the word Ruthful.

There are some underused words. I didn't know that word until Wednesday this week. Do you use the word Ruthful? I've never used it before. I've never used it in conversation.

It's the opposite of ruthless and to be Ruthful. I drop it in this afternoon to talk to someone. It means to be merciful, to be kind.

the opposite of being ruthless, to be Ruthful. It's where you don't give people what they deserve when it's punishment. You give them mercy.

And Jesus we see here even at that moment of his risen glory when he overpowers death is thinking of small people. He's Ruthful.

[15 : 12] He's thinking of people who need mercy. He's thinking of those who are failures, who are weighed down and heavy laden. He's thinking of his disciples. Can you see what this messenger, this angel says?

He's given a message by Jesus. The message that he's given by Jesus in verse 6. He says, do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified. He was crucified.

He has risen. He's not here. see the place where they laid him. But go tell his disciples and Peter that he's going before you to Galilee.

So the women, like the angel, are given the message. As you've read the gospels, the disciples are an abysmal bunch. Jesus talks about his death and so they talk about who is going to be the greatest.

as you read the gospel of Mark, you see how awful they are, how slow they are, how much like me they are.

[16:23] Appallingly egocentric in the face of beautiful things. Tim Keller as a preacher in the US, he says this, it's interesting what Jesus could have said.

He could have said this, you go and tell the disciples those arrogant, boastful, egocentric, ambitious, cowardly backstabbers that if they'll really get on their knees and repent, I might meet them in Galilee.

He could have easily said, you are kidding. Not one of them stood by him. All of them ran. And yet Jesus' words are, can you see them in verse seven?

Go and tell my friends. He's got every ground doesn't he to say it's over, our friendship is over, you're dead to me. And yet Jesus says tell my friends.

And the part that I particularly love are these two words that are there in verse seven after disciples and Peter. Why not tell my disciples and John?

[17:29] Why not tell my disciples and James? Why does Peter get a special mention? Go and tell his disciples and Peter that he's going to see you in Galilee.

Galilee, Peter is one of the disciples. Why single him out? Why mention him directly? If you read through the chapters before, it would be great to do that maybe today, there's a dialogue that goes on between Jesus and Peter.

And Jesus is warning his disciples, he says to them, you will all desert me. And Peter stands up and says, they may, but I won't. they may run, but I will die for you.

They are a pretty scummy bunch, Lord, and I don't even really know why you chose them, Lord, but I will stay true, I will stay loyal. Even if everyone else goes, I'll be with you, Lord, you can trust me.

And Jesus says to him, no, Peter, before the cockle crows three times, you will deny me three times. Peter gets the warning and he still argues back with Jesus, he's still correcting Jesus, he says, no, Jesus, you're not right.

[18:44] And remember that publicly denying Jesus is a pretty big deal. According to Jesus in Mark chapter 8, Jesus said, if you deny before men, I will deny you before my father.

If you're not willing to own my relationship with you, don't expect me to own your relationship with me on judgment day.

And so Peter has committed a grade A sin, not once, not twice, but three times. Three times on one night. And despite being forewarned and forearmed, Peter has sinned with a high hand deliberately. And yet Jesus wants to make sure that Peter is there. Because you can imagine that hearing the news that Jesus has risen from the dead, Peter would quite rightly think to himself, you go fellas, I'm clearly not part of the team anymore.

I've really blown it. Good luck to you. But I'm out. In a rugby game, there are two cards disciplinary things.

[20:03] There is a yellow card, which if you get shown the yellow card, you're off for ten minutes. You're put in the bin. You sit on the side, and after ten minutes, you can come back into the game.

But there's the red card, and if you're shown the red card, you cannot come back on. You have to leave the pitch, you go into the changing room. You can't come back on.

You're off permanently. It's game over. And I want to suggest to you that when Jesus says, tell my disciples and Peter, he's saying that because Peter would almost certainly think that he's red carded himself.

That it's game over. That Peter would be completely aware of how weak he was. And in spite of many warnings from Jesus, Peter has denied him.

And so Jesus tells the angel to tell the women, to tell Peter, I want to see him, I want him to be there. And I want to reveal myself to him. And I think we have a tendency in churches sometimes to take our sin more seriously than we would take the grace and the mercy of God.

[21:21] It's right, it's right to take our sin and our rebellion seriously. But your sin is never as big as the mercy and love of God.

The message of Christianity, the message of the good news of the Lord Jesus is that where sin has abounded, grace has much more abounded. the risen one is full of ruth.

He is ruthless. Give us more R's, you say. The risen ruthless one is a rock. It's good news, isn't it? The messengers look at verse 7, but go tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee, there you will see him. And here's the point, just as he told you, he doesn't need to say those last words, does he?

It doesn't add anything in terms of direction, but it does say something really, really wonderful, just as he told you. The messenger wants to say to the women and to the disciples, he's doing just what he told you beforehand.

[22 : 32] If you would just listen to what he said, you could have saved yourself an enormous amount of pain and confusion. Jesus is a man of his word. He does as he says.

Even if no one believes him, and none of his disciples did, interestingly, if you look at Matthew's gospel, which we're not looking at today, Matthew is at least the high priest has listened.

The people who put him to death, they had heard Jesus and they took him seriously and they asked for a guard to be put on the tomb because they were worried that he might rise. In fact, they weren't worried about that.

They thought he was a liar, but they thought that his disciples might come and steal the body, so they put an armed guard on the tomb. But none of the disciples think to themselves, well, he did say he'd come to Jerusalem, he'd be arrested, he'd be handed over, he'd be executed, and on the third day, he'd rise again.

Maybe we should just go and look at the tomb on Sunday morning. Maybe we could go for a morning walk near the tomb. None of them think that took his word seriously.

[23 : 42] Everything that he'd said about him, so powerful and yet dying, it just seems so weird. They didn't even take the repeated promise.

You can read it in Mark 8, Mark 9, Mark 10, where Jesus tells them exactly what he's going to do. That he will go to Jerusalem, he will be arrested, he'll be tortured, he'll be executed, and then he'll rise again.

But the angel wants to underline it. He told you this, he's only doing what he told you. He will keep his promise. He never makes a promise he doesn't keep.

In fact, he does more than keep his promises, doesn't he? I was in a meeting recently where people were told to under-promise and over-deliver.

I'm sure you've heard that in business, under-promise and over-deliver. Promise less than you think you'll deliver and then try to make sure that you give more than you promise.

[24 : 49] And Jesus says, I'll meet you in Galilee. He actually also meets them in Jerusalem. They do meet him in Galilee. There are a number of times up north, but he comes to them actually on Easter night. and then for at least a month, Jesus over-delivers on his appearances.

And so you can absolutely trust Jesus' word. Do you? I'm not asking if you go to church. I'm not asking if you're religious. I'm not asking if you've got respect for Jesus. I'm asking, do you listen to those things that Jesus says in his word?

In Mark 13, just a few chapters before, Jesus says this staggering statement. He says, heaven and earth will pass away, but my word will never pass away. Not everyone believed like modern science does today, that the universe one day will pass away.

They tend to think the universe was eternal. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. Who says that? This little man in Palestine, his words are absolutely solidly, eternally, endearingly true.

And we save ourselves an enormous amount of pain and worry and fear and anxiety when we believe his word, when we cling to his promises. He is risen, he is ruthless, he is the rock.

[26 : 14] You wouldn't bet against him, would you? He says he's going to come again. I wouldn't bet against Jesus' truthfulness. He said he would rise again, and he has. And the last point is that the risen Ruthful rock is in the business of recruiting.

They are reluctant when he first meets them. He doesn't say to them, come and follow me, let's have some fun together.

He says, come and follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. that was what he said to them.

He hints to them then, that's what their calling would be. Here the women are the first to hear the news because they're the ones at the tomb, and they are told, go, tell his disciples, and Peter that

he's going before you to Galilee.

And there you will see him just as he told you. And the women are given a job to do. Mary Magdalene has often been called the apostle to the apostles. And in the end, she is the first one to take the apostle's message.

He is risen. And they're slow on the uptake. And so we look at verse 8, don't we, and we think that's a really bad ending to a gospel, don't we? The gospel clearly ends at verse 8.

[27 : 38] There are two or three other endings that people have added because it looks like a bad ending, but the best manuscripts all end at verse 8. And actually, as you read Mark's gospel, it makes sense to end at it's such an odd ending, isn't it?

The women are told, it's fantastic, you're here, girls, go and tell the boys. 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.

In verse 8, who knows about the resurrection at this point? Well, God does, the devil does, Jesus does, the young man does, the women do.

That's it. And the disciples would really, really like to know that he is risen. And the women have been told to tell the disciples. They're the only people who've been told to tell.

And I don't blame them, frankly, for how they respond. To use a technical term, they've been discombobulated, haven't they? You know what that word means? It means when you've been rattled by things that you can't function properly, they are discombobulated.

[28 : 59] I don't blame the women, just trace the emotional journey that the women have been on. They've come up with Jesus, the disciples are abandoning Jesus and betraying him, and Judas has left them, who they knew and they loved.

And Jesus has not just been killed, he's been tortured to death, that's what crucifixion is, it's humiliating. They would have been emotionally shattered and they go to finish the burial process and then somebody's messed around with the tomb.

It's no wonder that they're shattered. And the words in verse 8 of Mark 16 are really strong words, they are trembling, bewildered, afraid, and they don't speak.

And if you know Mark's gospel, like we've been going through on Tuesday lunchtimes, you will know that this is a reversal. Because all through Mark's gospel, when Jesus has healed with someone, he has said to them, don't tell anyone.

One time Jesus healed a leper and Jesus is really strong with him, he basically says, shut up about it, don't say anything. But they can't keep it to themselves. Because something wonderful and exciting has happened.

[30 : 14] And even when Peter works out that Jesus is the Messiah, he's told don't tell anyone yet. But here the women at the end of Mark's gospel are told, he is risen.

Death has been beaten, but they're so shattered they just say nothing. saying. It's quite clear that as time goes on they change their mind. This gospel is written probably for Christians in Rome. And they would have all known that Jesus is risen from the dead. That he would have appeared to the disciples. Because that was the message that the apostles preached, isn't it? You killed him, God raised him, we've seen him.

That's how we know he's Lord. And so here the women are told to speak, but at first they don't. And I take it they repent and they are told. And I think one of the reasons why Mark includes it and he ends it in this way is because this is the temptation always for Christians.

For the church, because we get the fact that he is risen and forgiveness is on offer and you can know Jesus in the present tense, not just in the historical tense. And you can know him as a living presence in our lives.

[31 : 27] And instead of answering people and telling people, well I find the temptation is to be quiet and to get nervous.

And I think Mark's gospel is ending in the way it is to say to us, do not be silenced, speak in fear. It's why the apostles in the New Testament, they prayed didn't they, for courage to open their mouths. He is risen. He is alive. As I round up, if you're still not sure this morning if this is a lie or fake news, there is very good evidence for it.

Take a look at it. You think Jesus is lying and the early Christians were lying and the whole of Christianity is based on a lie. Or will you realise this morning he is risen from the dead and he is alive.

And I want to urge you to check out the evidence. And if you're a person more likely who believes this, you need to let this truth give yourself a chance this Easter Sunday to let this truth move from your head, which you know about, into your heart.

[32 : 52] death. Because this is very, very exciting stuff. That death does not have the last word. There is a person who when you go into death will go with you and he will give you the last word and the last laugh on death.

And so can I suggest to you doing something that I've never suggested before in the pulpit and I'm pretty certain that no IPC minister has ever suggested before. And that is, listen to Dolly Parton. Because as bizarre as it is, I discovered a song this week by Dolly Parton called He's Alive. Anybody listen to it? It's absolutely remarkable. She didn't write it.

There's a choir at the end. It's magnificent. And as you listen to it, as I've inflicted it on my family this week, meal time, you get a sense of the fact that He's alive.

She tells the story of Peter and the resurrection. And you get a sense of the wonder. He is alive. He's alive and I'm forgiven.

[34 : 00] Jesus said, I am the living one. I was dead. And now behold, I'm alive forever and ever. Christ is risen.

Let's pray. desde desde desde