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"The Road to Resurrection: Go, Tell"

Mark 16: 1-8

An Arab chief tells a story of a spy who was captured and then sentenced to death by a general in the Persian army. This general had the strange custom of giving condemned criminals a choice between the firing squad and the big, black door. As the moment for execution drew near, the spy was brought to the Persian general, who asked the question, "What will it be: the firing squad or the big, black door?"

The spy hesitated for a long time. It was a difficult decision. He chose the firing squad.

Moments later shots rang out confirming his execution. The general turned to his aide and said, "They always prefer the known way to the unknown. It is characteristic of people to be afraid of the undefined. Yet, we gave him a choice."

The aide said, "What lies beyond the big door?"

"Freedom," replied the general. "I've known only a few brave enough to take it."

In ch. 16 of Mark's gospel he tells of 3 women who, like someone you may know, are overwhelmed with grief and terrified by the unknown. Their story ends with them in fear, but also in joy.

In this last week of messages on Jesus' Road to Resurrection, I want you to consider with me how Jesus broke the power of darkness so that You and I can live in the light.

1. Life without Resurrection is a dark prison of hopelessness. v. 1-3

A. The story begins with the 3 women in an emotional fog, shell-shocked by the horror they had witnessed two days before at the foot of a Roman cross.

With a sense of hopelessness, they walk to the burial site of a friend who spoke of Grace, forgiveness, Eternal Life and light, but His light had been extinguished, and now they are surrounded by darkness.

v. 1 " When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint [Jesus' body]."

Since the Sabbath was over at 6 PM, the first trip may have been in the dark. Indeed we read in John 20:1 "Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb"

Some of you are here this morning feeling your world is equally dark.

There is a lot of darkness in our world [unpack]

What makes it seem darker is that some of you cannot see God's mercies every day.

Some of you can identify with these 3 women. You have trusted in Jesus, but it seems He has disappointed you. You feel let down.

If the truth were told, you are here this morning because of your family, not because of your Faith. That's OK. I'm glad you're here.

B. There's more to the darkness. Mark says they "bought spices so that they might go and anoint Jesus' body."

John 19:39 (NKJV) tells us "Nicodemus, who at first came to Jesus by night ... brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds.

Perhaps they thought this was not enough, or did not know what He had done.

In any case, here they are doing an unpleasant job, but somebody has to do it; it might as well be them.

Maybe you can identify with that, too.

The darkness of your life is that the central core of your Faith is as lifeless as a mummy-wrapped corpse.

Your joy has been squeezed to death. You still consider yourself a follower of Jesus, but your Sunday walk from the parking lot to the door of the church is as pained as that of those 3 women. You are doing your duty.

Church is a chore, your obedience is an obligation. Somebody's got to show up, it might as well be you.

That's being imprisoned by the darkness! Whatever feelings you might appear to have as you sing the hymns, you're faking it.

C. As if the darkness and the distasteful chore were not enough, v. 2-3 says that " they were saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?"

There was even an obstacle to their hope to honor the remains of their beloved teacher and friend.

This one, however is a worry that's already been taken care of. Turns out they're expending energy over a stone that has already been removed.

Some people worry ahead of time before they know for sure there is really a problem.

Some of you are like that. You are here to celebrate that Jesus is Lord and in control of your life, and you really believe that, but you are none the less stressed out about what could happen at work or school, or at home or in church next week.

I can't be too hard on you, because I am sometimes guilty of it too. It's called living in Faith without turning on the lights. It's like being wired but not plugged in.

When you have access to God, but choose to worry in the dark, it's a way of yielding to the power of darkness.

trans: Life without the Resurrection is a dark prison of hopelessness, but ...

2. Jesus broke the power of darkness so that You and I can live in the light. v. 4-6

A. When they came to the cemetery, they discovered there was nothing to worry about.

They found their reasons for being angry and disappointed with Jesus were no longer valid. He wasn't dead anymore!

v. 4-6 "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."

Someone has said, "When we hold God at arm's length, we don't have a leg to stand on."

What may seem to be a hopeless case is never too final for God.

Death would seem to be the final chapter, the point of not recovery, the end of hope, but Jesus turned it around on that first Easter.

B. "What makes Jesus so attractive to people?" He broke the power of darkness so that You and I can live in the light.

For those who refuse to live in His light, he patiently counters our excuses, exposes our ignorance, and sets us free to live our lives as a Spiritual adventure. That's what it really is. Not just for a season, but for a lifetime!

ILL: It was June 18, 1815, the Battle of Waterloo. The French under the command of Napoleon were fighting the Allies (British, Dutch, and Germans) under the command of Wellington. The people of England depended on a system of signals to find out how the battle was going. One of these signal stations was on the tower of Winchester Cathedral.

Late in the day it flashed the signal: "W-E-L-L-I-N-G-T-O-N- - - D-E-F-E-A-T-E-D- -." Just at that moment one of those sudden English fog-clouds made it impossible to read the message. The news of defeat quickly spread throughout the city. The whole countryside was sad and gloomy when they heard the news that their country had lost the war.

Suddenly the fog lifted, and the remainder of the message could be read. The message had four words, not two. The complete message was: "W-E-L-L-I-N-G-T-O-N- - -D-E-F-E-A-T-E-D- - T-H-E- - -E-N-E-M-Y!" It took only a few minutes for the good news to spread. Sorrow was turned into joy, defeat was turned into victory!

So it was when Jesus was laid in the tomb on the first Good Friday afternoon. Hope had died even in the hearts of Jesus' most loyal friends. After the frightful crucifixion the fog of disappointment and misunderstanding had rolled in on the friends of Jesus. They had "read" only part of the Divine message. "Christ defeated"
 [Topic: Christ, Subtopic: Suffered and Died, Index: 3367 Title: THE FOG LIFTED]

C. As we celebrate Jesus this Resurrection Sunday morning, we celebrate His escape from the abyss of death, but we also celebrate the freedom He makes possible for us.

Christian history is full of examples of people who suffered under the cruelest, most horrifying tools of evil, such as Slavery, the Holocaust and Stalin's Purges but who, by God's Grace, were not defeated, but overcame suffering.

Samuel Wesley gave this victory a voice when he wrote, "Long my imprisoned spirit lay
 fast bound in sin and nature's night.
 Thine eye diffused a quickening ray.
 I woke, the dungeon flamed with light!
 My chains fell off, my heart was free,
 I rose, went forth, and followed Thee"

D. How do we continue to live in the light?

1. By praying with a pencil, writing down what God is showing and telling you.
2. By affirming people instead of criticizing or competing with them.
3. By finding or forming a small group of Christians to support you and hold you accountable in your personal Christian growth.

trans: Life without the Resurrection is a dark prison of hopelessness, but Jesus broke the power of darkness so that You and I can live in the light.

3. Jesus has commissioned those who live in the light to tell others what He has done. v. 7-8

A. You can also see in this story that God has given every Christian someone else to tell about what God has done and is doing in their life. v. 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."

The women are commissioned to tell the disciples, and especially Peter, who, because of his denial of Christ, might think he had messed up too badly to be forgiven.

There are more people in your sphere of influence that are on their way to a Relationship with Jesus right now than you realize.

Some of them are unlikely candidates, so don't overlook "lost causes."

Remember the Lighthouses of Prayer motto of Prayer, Care, and Share.

Begin by praying for specific people in your school, neighborhood or place of work.

Look for ways to show you Care about them.

Be ready to Share your story when God opens the way with a question or comment.

B. If this seems a little scary, you are in good company. Check out v. 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."

At first, the women were struck speechless.

I like that. It doesn't read like a fairy tale, but says they struggled to believe & obey, as most of us do.

Who would believe it? An angel and a Resurrection? And from 3 women, who, in that culture were not considered reliable witnesses.

If you have lived under the influence of darkness for a while, it takes time to adjust to the light.

If you are not a high-intensity floodlight today, know that God is patient with penlights.

God's arms are open to people at every stage of believing, but just be willing to let God upgrade you as He pleases.

He will do it, as with the 3 women in our story.

C. The other gospels give us "the rest of the story"

1. Mat 28:8 (NKJV) " So they went out quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to bring His disciples word."

Note that they not only did as they were told, but God added to their fear the gift of being "filled with joy!"

Get into God's presence, & He will do the same in you.

2. Not only did they tell the disciples, but Luke 24:9 says, "They returned from the tomb and told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest."

ILL: In Acts 26:1-18, Paul tells his story of how God met Him in the midst of what he thought was holy activity, and he was struck blind by a light on the Damascus Road.

By the time God is finished with him, Paul understands his mission in life as God described it to him: Acts 26:16-18 (NKJV) "But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me."

God has not called us all to go where Paul went, but He has called ordinary people like You and me to be willing in the same way to allow Jesus to shine through them.

If you were able to bring people back from the time of Christ and ask them, "What attracted you to Jesus?", someone would say, "I like it that He rose from the dead. He took the worst pain, suffering and humiliation that this world had to inflict on anyone, and He came out victorious!"

Jesus broke the power of darkness, and now we can live in the light!

Action: Admit to yourself and others where you struggle with the darkness of hopelessness.

Set your mind on the one whose tomb is open because He is alive to this day.

Tell someone why you do not have to be afraid of disappointments, rejections, earthly losses, or even death!