



New Day Church

Need a fresh start?

A DEMANDING DISCOVERY

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In 1972 a crack commando unit was sent to prison by a military court for a crime they didn't commit. These men promptly escaped from a maximum security stockade to the Los Angeles underground. Today, still wanted by the government, they survive as soldiers of fortune. If you have a problem, if no one else can help, and if you can find them, maybe you can hire the A-Team.

I looked forward to those words every week back in the early 1980s. I couldn't wait to see Face, Murdock, B.A. and Hannibal get out of the next sticky situation for the A-Team. Hannibal was the mastermind behind all their strategies, which never quite went the way he thought they would. But somehow, everything always turned out right, and Hannibal would close the show by saying, "I love it when a plan comes together."

If you're visiting this morning, we've been studying the book of Mark over the past few months. Mark chronicles the life of Jesus for us from the time he first started his ministry until he rose again. Today we're wrapping up our study with the final chapter of the book that focuses on the resurrection of Jesus. And wouldn't you know it – today is also Easter. I love it when a plan comes together.

When we last left Jesus, it was Palm Sunday. He was riding into Jerusalem in what looked like a victory parade. But in the week that's gone by since then, things took a shocking turn: Jesus was arrested, falsely accused, put on trial, beaten up and crucified. By noon on Friday, he was dead.

A man named Joseph from the town of Arimathea had some pull and was able to convince the authorities to let him at least give Jesus a proper burial. Quite often crucified criminals were left on their crosses after they died to send a message to other would be criminals. But Pilate agreed to letting Jesus be taken down and put in a grave.

That was Friday. Jewish law insisted that burials had to happen prior to sundown on a Friday, because that was when the Sabbath started. So Joseph didn't have time to even give Jesus a decent funeral. He placed the body in the tomb, which would have been an above ground cave with a shelf cut in the stone on which to lay out the body. Then he rolled a large rock in front of the cave to seal it off.

As you might suspect, that's where our story picks up today.

Mark 16:1 - 8

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. 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?"

But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.

"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. 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.'"

Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

If you brought a Bible with you this morning, you may notice there are a few more verses on the page. It looks like the text continues on. You may also see a note like this: "The most reliable early manuscripts and other ancient witnesses do not have Mark 16:9-20." Scholars agree that where we just stopped is where the original version of Mark stopped. Later versions add sort of an appendix, summarizing more of what happened after Jesus rose from the dead. But the oldest copies of Mark end on this abrupt note with the women running away afraid.

Let me pause here for a minute because for some of you, I'm treading on sacred ground and raising questions about how we got the Bible we have today. Can we trust it? Is it full of inconsistencies?

The truth is that the Bible stands up really well to scrutiny. The ancient manuscripts that have been found are remarkably consistent, especially considering everything had to be copied by hand. What's more, the early church leaders who wrote commentaries on Mark's letter all knew about these extra verses and point out that they were added later. It's not as though anyone is trying to pretend something was the work of the original author. And the content of the extra verses is solid – there is nothing in them you won't find other places in the Bible.

My point this morning is not to cast doubt on the additional verses. I just think it's worth asking why Mark stopped where he did. If his original ending point came before anyone had seen the risen Jesus, what was he wanting to communicate?

When we were in Hawaii, Karin captured this great shot of the kids on these rocks. She caught the split second before this huge wall of water came crashing down on top of Isaac and soaked him. It's right at the moment that he saw it, but before he realized what it

meant. Afterwards, all we talked about was how drenched Isaac was. So it was great to discover we also had a record of this fleeting moment in time.

That's what Mark gives us – a snapshot of a moment that was quickly overshadowed by what came next. Normally on Easter, I have jumped ahead to Matthew, Luke or John to talk about the encounters different disciples had with the Jesus after the resurrection. We like to get to the parts where Mary meets Jesus in the garden or when he makes breakfast for the disciples by the lake.

But if we stick with Mark and resist the urge to fast forward, we see how emotionally charged this moment was for the women at the tomb as they make this discovery. It's not quite joy yet – they're left in the throes of trying to take in what the angel told them. It's unsettling and life changing, but they're not sure just how.

As we sit here, some 2000 years later, I think the experience of these women resonates with us. We've been told Jesus rose from the dead, but many of us aren't quite sure what to make of it. We're right there with them in that moment of processing the information and how it relates to us in the 21st century.

Harvey Cox wrote a book called, "When Jesus came to Harvard". As a professor there, he had been asked to teach a class on Jesus and morals. The Harvard administration had realized that many of their graduates were becoming famously involved in ethical scandals, and they began to ask, "Are we providing the right kind of education?" Graduates were sophisticated when it came to technical skills, but seemed to be completely lacking in any moral fiber. So the school added this ethics component to the curriculum, and in that program, they asked Harvey Cox to teach a class on Jesus and morals without it being a "Christian" class.

Hundred and hundreds of students signed up for the course each year – people from every possible religious stripe and ethnic background. But they weren't satisfied to just hear about the moral ideals of Jesus. They wanted to know about the resurrection. Harvey Cox tried to teach about Jesus' life up until the crucifixion, but his students wouldn't let him end there. He says,

Many of them had been drawn to Jesus as a rebel against the status quo, as a daring moral exemplar, or as an inspiring teacher of spiritual wisdom; still, they were puzzled, not just by this climax as it is told in the Gospels, but also by why it seemed so central in Christianity. No one had ever claimed that the Buddha or Confucius or Socrates or the Prophet Mohamet had returned from the dead. Why Jesus?

That's really the question Easter brings us back to every year. Why is the resurrection important? Why would Paul write to the Corinthians and say,

1 Cor 15:14

And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.

When we have Jesus' teachings and example of how to live, isn't that enough? Or the fact that he died such a sacrificial death that was a picture of love and forgiveness, isn't that enough? How necessary is the resurrection, and what does it add to our understanding of what Christ was all about?

Those are the questions the women had to wrestle with that day in the tomb. They had spent the past few years soaking in every word Jesus had to say, watching him perform miracles. As sad as they were about his death, nobody could take those memories away from them, and they so much wanted to grieve over their loss and find some closure. Now the angel tells them there's more to the story and they're left reeling, trying to make sense of what that means. How did this new bit about Jesus fit in with their previous experience of him?

One thing was for sure: Things would never be the same. They could not go back to the same place they were before the angel said what he did. They could be skeptical or disturbed or thrilled, but they couldn't ignore it.

That's how the resurrection is. It demands something of us. Once it's on the table we can't go back to the way things were before we knew about it. Author N.T. Wright says it's one of those things you can't talk about without getting personally involved in the answer. Whether you believe it really happen or you believe it didn't, the choice you make affects how you live. It's not a neutral fact to talk about – it's one of those that shapes our lives and decisions. N.T. Wright makes the point when he says, "If it happened it matters. The world is a different place from what it would be if it did not happen."

That's what's going on in this ending of Mark. The women are struggling to take in what they've just heard and make sense of it. They are still grappling with the ramifications of the angel's words. As I see it, their situation shines a light on just what it is that the resurrection demands of us as well. First, it asks us to

Reboot

If you have Windows XP on your computer, you know those familiar messages that pop up telling you a new upgrade is ready to install. In order for that to happen, though, you have to shut down the computer and restart it. In a way, the idea of the resurrection is so new that it requires us to reboot our worldview.

Look again at the words the angel shared with the women:

You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him.

That was a staggering piece of information. He wasn't saying, "Oh Jesus will always be alive in spirit." He was saying Jesus was physically alive again. Look where his body was – it's gone. It defies everything the women knew to be true about reality. Dead

bodies do not spontaneously come back to life. To believe Jesus had risen again meant completely rethinking what is possible in this world.

Ever since people were able to accurately time running races, everyone thought that the 4 minute mile was an absolute barrier no human being could cross. One runner from back in that era named John Landy said it was seen as so impossible a feat that, "People thought it was like bouncing off a brick wall."

Then on May 6, 1954, Roger Bannister ran the mile in 3 minutes and 59.4 seconds. He accomplished the unthinkable. Forbes magazine listed it as the greatest athletic achievement of all time. But when he did it, suddenly, the mental barrier was breached. Within weeks, someone else had beaten his time, and today runners consistently are able to turn in times under 4 minutes.

Years ago, I had the privilege once of getting to have dinner with Chuck Yeager. Back in 1947, he was the first person to travel faster than the speed of sound in an airplane. Up until that time, people had thought that was undoable. But once it had been done, it was possible for others. Today even cars break the sound barrier.

This is what the resurrection of Jesus did: It broke through barriers that have seemed impossible to overcome. He was the only one who could do it. He didn't just pave the way – He is the way. OUR whole idea of reality needs a reboot to internalize just how radically it changes everything.

One of the obvious barriers the resurrection drills through is

The barrier of death

In a world with no resurrection, death has an absolute finality to it. It's a brick wall that we all go screeching into eventually. And that's all we've seen of death. When a friend of mine died in high school, for a while I kept having this sense that I would see him walk into the room again sometime. But he never actually did. Neither has anyone else that I have known who has died. Death presents itself as this unbreakable barrier, because we can't see what's on the other side of it.

When Karin and I were in college, we were in readers theater programs like the one you saw this morning, except they would be about 20 or 30 minutes long. We would compete with other colleges in tournaments across the country. The first program we did was all about death. It started and ended with a song that said, "Death ain't ya got no shame?" At 18 and 19 we didn't connect all that deeply with the emotion of that song. But the older I get, the more I understand why the Bible calls death a thief. It's got no shame. It robs us, and it doesn't give back.

When you're pondering deep theological questions like this one, sometimes you need to go to Starbucks. Or at least you need a cup from there. They have all those quotes on

their paper cups. The other day, I had a cup with a quote from Dale Chihuly, the glass artist from Tacoma. He said this:

Color is one of the great properties of glass and is more intense in glass than any other material. Imagine entering Chartres Cathedral and looking up at the rose window: you can see a one inch square of ruby red glass from 300 feet away.

Here's the window he was talking about. The red in those little bits of glass is so intense, that even from a great distance, you can still see it.

As I read that quote, I thought: the resurrection is like a tiny bit of ruby red glass with light shining through. There's an intensity to it. We're standing a long way away from it, but even from here we can see its bright and beautiful color. It stands out against the blackness of death, like a tear in the curtain that lets the light of heaven through. Death may still be a barrier, but it has a hole in it now, because of the resurrection.

That's why the resurrection is such awesome news. I like the way The Message version of the Bible translates Paul's words to the Romans:

Romans 6:9

We know that when Jesus was raised from the dead it was a signal of the end of death-as-the-end. Never again will death have the last word.

That's so huge that we hardly can take it in. There's now something to look forward to beyond death, and it's something far better and more solid than anything we know on this side of death.

My grandfather was a big believer in the reality of the resurrection, and he passed on that belief to his children. When he was near death, my dad wrote him one last letter, trying to put feelings into words. At the end of the letter he wrote, "I'll just close by saying what you always used to say to me when you tucked me into bed: Good night. I'll see you in the morning."

That's the truth the resurrection gives us – that the night won't last forever. There is a morning coming. We will wake up with Jesus and have a whole new day in front of us.

There's another barrier the resurrection knocks down, and that's the **Barrier of injustice**

Mark tells us that the women who came to anoint Jesus' body had also watched the whole crucifixion. They saw someone that they loved and respected tried and executed on trumped up charges – a completely innocent man, punished in the most brutal way possible. If you've ever read a description of how horrible Roman crucifixion was, you know it was hard core. The very word excruciating means out of the cross, and it was literally coined to describe the level of agony experienced by people hung on a cross.

Nothing else compared to it. When someone who has done nothing wrong is put through that kind of suffering, you have the ultimate picture of injustice.

C.S. Lewis called this the problem of pain. We look around at the world and our own experience and we say: How can there be a good and loving God when there is so much evil and hurt in the world? How could he allow this?

It's one of the most difficult issues to come to terms with. Even Jesus on the cross gave voice to that question when he prayed those words from the Psalms, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Those women must have been wondering the same thing that day in their grief.

But then those words of the angel brought them up short:

You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him.

All the wrongs done to Jesus had been set right. The resurrection is God's answer to injustice, because it says that ultimately, good will triumph. We may not always see complete justice in our short life time, but God is not turning a deaf ear to our cries. And his method of addressing our pain was not to wipe it out, but to enter into it himself, endure it and conquer it.

The mystery writer Dorothy Sayers put it this way: "God did not abolish the fact of evil: He transformed it. He did not stop the crucifixion: He rose from the dead."

Hope is at the very heart of the resurrection. We don't need to wonder if God understands our difficulties – the crucifixion proved he's felt the worst right along with the rest of humanity. And we don't need to wonder if all this suffering is endless, because Jesus has already been raised.

I cling to that. In my role as pastor, not a week goes by when I don't learn of some deep heartache, some injustice or some form of suffering in somebody's life. And that's just within our little church. People carry heavy, heavy loads. And I have no comfort to speak into their lives except the fact that Jesus has been there himself, he identifies with us completely, and he has come through on the other side.

Sometimes we're able to see God's hand at work and miraculous things happen. But many times we don't get answers to our why questions. What we stand on then is the resurrection. His resurrection is the proof that God wins the day. That's the only hope we have. But it's not just wishful thinking -- it's a sure hope that's grounded in the reality of the resurrection.

One final wall knocked over by the resurrection is the **Barrier of sin**

Normally, we think of the cross more than the resurrection as being the place where God dealt with the issue of sin. Think of a trial where someone is found guilty and the verdict carries a mandatory death sentence. But in an extraordinary turn of events, the judge says to the convicted man, "I'm going to take your place. You're free to go."

In essence, that's what Jesus did for us on the cross. From the start, humanity chose to break God's law, and since God is life, separating ourselves from God meant death for us – not just physical, but spiritual as well. God wanted us restored to a good relationship with him, but as we've just seen, he's a God of justice. He couldn't ignore the facts. But he could offer to take our punishment for us. And that's exactly what Jesus did by dying willingly for us, even though he himself had never broken that relationship with God the Father.

So it's on the cross that we think of as that price being paid. We know we're forgiven because of that. But that could be true even if Jesus had stayed dead. The sacrifice would have been no less effective or important.

As we said, though, what God is interested in is that relationship – not just paying off our debt.

I love it that even in Mark's shortened version of the story, he manages to include this important statement by the angel:

But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee.

He singles out Peter, for one important reason: Peter felt like he had no business counting himself as one of Jesus' disciples anymore. He had done the unthinkable and turned his back on Jesus right in his hour of need. When some of Jesus' accusers identified Peter as one of his followers, Peter denied even knowing him. He sold out to save his own skin.

Then Jesus had caught his eye afterwards. Can you imagine the guilt and the shame? Here's Peter, who always talked so big about his commitment to Jesus. Peter who said he was ready to die for him. Now he's pretending he never heard of him. He had to have felt a tremendous amount of regret, knowing Jesus was gone for good, and there was no chance to say "I'm sorry." Peter had done the one thing he swore he never would, and now it was too late to make amends. Even if he knew in his heart Christ would have forgiven him, the chance to pick up the pieces and restore the relationship was over.

At least that's what he thought. But he wasn't taking into account a resurrected Jesus. The angel made sure that Peter knew Jesus wanted him included. He now had the opportunity to not only be forgiven, but also to reconnect, because Jesus wasn't dead – he was alive and waiting to welcome him.

The cross covered our past with God; the resurrection gives us a future with him. If Jesus didn't just die a sacrificial death, if he came back to life, that means relationship is

possible. The resurrection puts a face with forgiveness. Not only are we forgiven – we can have a friendship with God.

Maybe you've turned your back on God or you've done something so terrible you feel like he wouldn't possibly forgive you or want you around. The resurrection says we don't have a God who gives up. And if he reached out to somebody like Peter, I can know he's reaching out to me as well, no matter what I've done. There's still room for relationship. Another barrier has been torn down.

So the women were asked to reboot – to rethink and reexamine their understanding of reality. The resurrection asks the same thing of us – what do we think is possible? What do we see as barriers that are maybe not as solid as we once thought?

The resurrection asked for more than a reboot from the women. It also asked them to **respond**. Let's look one more time at the angel's words:

“You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him.

The women weren't just given some news – they were given news that required action. They were fairly simple responses. First, they had to **Let go of what's lifeless**.

Their concept of Jesus was that he was dead. They respected him, they cared about him, but for all intents and purposes he would be of no more use to them, because they saw his place as now being in history. He was no longer connected with their day to day existence. Quite naturally, they thought of him as lifeless. They had to let go of that idea and entertain the possibility that he was still very much alive and active and wanting to be involved in their lives.

Many of us have a lifeless idea of Jesus as well. He's part of an ancient religion, a character from a book that we don't even read. Maybe we go so far as to buy into some of the things he taught. But he's still lifeless in our minds. He's not a real person who wants to interact with us.

The resurrection doesn't leave that as an option, though. We have to see the place where they laid him and acknowledge that it's empty. He's not still in the tomb, which means he's very much alive. And if he's still alive, he's still calling people into relationship with him. We're asked to let go of what's lifeless in our ideas of who he is.

Then the angel said this:

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.’”

The second thing the women were asked to do was **Move toward Jesus**

He was going to be in Galilee. If the disciples wanted to see him, they were going to need to get up out of their hiding place in Jerusalem and go to Galilee. Only then would they see him. I'm sure that they would have liked to have more to go on than that promise, maybe a note in Jesus' handwriting or a quick little visit from him. But instead they are just told to go.

Sometimes, a move, a step of faith is required of us before we get the confirmation we're wanting. We want to see that Jesus is really who he says he is, but we may not see that until we make a move in his direction.

It could be that this morning is that move for you. Maybe just being here for Easter and hearing about the resurrection again is a big step. Maybe you're wanting to investigate things more for yourself. If so, we have some free books on the back table that go into more detail about the Easter story, told by a journalist who tried to discredit the whole notion of the resurrection only to end up believing it. If that's where you're at, make sure you take a copy at the end of the service.

Maybe you've never talked to Christ and invited him into your life, but you want to move past some of those barriers we talked about. You can very simply pray to him this very moment and say, "Jesus, I believe in what you did on the cross and that you rose again, and I know I need you. Come into my life and forgive me and help me know how to have a relationship with you." When you take that kind of step, he will respond in a real way today, giving you his spirit and helping you to see him more and more.

There's a Switchfoot song that says, "I dare you to move like today never happened before." It does take daring to make a move toward Christ that you haven't before. If you're wanting to see more of him in your life, what are you willing to do differently to look for him? The question isn't whether Jesus is alive and well. The question is where we're looking or IF we're looking. What are we doing to move in his direction this morning so we can know him better?

The resurrection changes everything. In the Lord of the Rings trilogy, the good wizard Gandalf the Grey dies as he battles to save his friends from a hideous, evil being called a Balrog. It's easy to see Christ in that picture, because it was such a sacrifice. And just like Jesus, Gandalf the Grey is resurrected as Gandalf the White. Here's how J.R.R. Tolkien describes the scene when Gandalf revealed his resurrected self to his friends.

His hood and his grey rags were flung away...His white garments shone. They all gazed at him. His hair was white as snow in the sunshine; and gleaming white was his robe; the eyes under his deep brows were bright, piercing as the rays of the sun; power was in his hand. Between wonder, joy, and fear they stood and found no words to say.

Then Gandalf says, "Be merry! We meet again. At the turn of the tide. The great storm is coming, but the tide has turned."

That's the closest fiction gets to showing us the real Jesus, the risen Son of God who is standing with his piercing eyes and power in his hand and he says to us, "Move toward me." This world is still full of hardship and pain. Many storms are yet to come. But the resurrection puts us at the turn of the tide. The barriers have been broken. Heaven itself is breaching the dam. We can live in light of a new reality.

Be merry. The tide has turned.