

Mark 16:1–8 When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so they could go and anoint Jesus. ²Very early on the first day of the week, at sunrise, they went to the tomb. ³They were saying to each other, “Who will roll the stone away from the entrance to the tomb for us?” ⁴When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away.

⁵As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed. ⁶He said to them, “Do not be alarmed. You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. ⁷But go, tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.’”

⁸They went out and hurried away from the tomb, trembling and perplexed.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and from our risen Savior, Jesus, dear brothers and sisters in Christ. Throughout the season of Lent we focused on the Hands of the Passion. From Judas’ betraying hands to Peter’s disowning hands, Caiaphas’ hands of misguided Zeal to pilates hands of self preservation. Finally, on Thursday we saw Jesus’ hands of humility, and we needed no reminder as to whose hands would be our focus on Friday. So who’s hands will we be viewing today?

The only hands present in our text are those of the women as they made their way to Jesus’ tomb as they contemplated how they would push the stone away. But, their hands might not be the best choice to focus on because of where their thoughts were, where their faith was. Sure, we could say they were faithful followers of Jesus because they had been waiting, counting down the minutes until the Sabbath was over and they could go and properly prepare Jesus’ body. But that’s just it. Had they trusted in Jesus’ words, they would have known that Jesus’ body didn’t need preparing for burial, but for life again. Had they believed in Jesus as the Savior God had promised, the problem of the stone wouldn’t have been how they were going to get in, but how Jesus was going to get out!

But there they were. Spices and ointments bought and ready to go because Jesus was dead. These were only their actions, think of what there thoughts and words must have been Friday night and all day Saturday? Every thought, each word, distracted, tainted by grief, overcome by inescapable sadness, mourning, despair, and fear.

How sad! That Jesus’ closest followers, probably just as close to Jesus as the disciples, were acting this way. We want to shake them and say, “Don’t you know? Weren’t you listening? Jesus died, yes, but he is not dead. He is risen!”

I wonder, if someone read about our words and actions 2000 years from *now*, what would they think of us? Would they think, “That’s someone who believed in Jesus as their Savior. Just look how they lived!” Hopefully! But let’s be honest. If a writer followed us around our lives and wrote only about the big events that happened, I wonder if our lives would read so sanctified and holy. There was something called coronavirus and they acted how? Such faithless worrying? There was a presidential election and things got crazy and they reacted how? Such faithless fear. Lockdowns were enforced, jobs were lost, prices went up, life changed, and they said what? What are we going to do? How is this going to work out? I don’t know what to think. I’m losing hope. I’m afraid. I’m giving up. Do these sound like the words of faith-filled followers of Jesus?

They sound more like the ramblings of sinners seeing only what’s right in front of them. We’ve all had those feelings over the last year. And Satan has had it easy. We went ten weeks without meeting for worship. We haven’t celebrated Easter, the greatest and most significant Sunday in the church year, for 2 years. What happens to an athlete who doesn’t visit the gym for 10 weeks? Bad habits form. It’s hard to get back in the swing of things. At times it feels like we’re still playing catch-up to the slack our sinful natures were given. Many of our thoughts, and even more so, our words and actions, are so often distracted, tainted by worry, overcome by fear.

Don’t you know?! Weren’t you listening? Jesus died, yes, but he is not dead. He is risen! And that truth changes everything! The women began to see that when they looked up and saw that the stone was already rolled away. It’s ironic that the first bit of relief came for them on Easter Sunday when they looked up and said, “Ah, we don’t have to open the tomb.” That relief that began as a trickle was about to turn into a deluge with the angel’s message: **Do not be alarmed. You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here.**

So profound, so extreme, so complete was the relief that came over them that they were alarmed and perplexed! The truth that Jesus was alive did

not compute. It was like putting a square peg in a round whole. It did not fit the reality they had been living in since Jesus' arrest and trial Thursday evening.

But it was true. Jesus died and Jesus rose again, proving everything he said was true. **I am the resurrection and the life.** He proved it! **He who believes in me will live, even though he dies!** It's true! **Whoever believes in me will not perish but have eternal life.** **This is my body, this is my blood, shed for you for the forgiveness of all your sins.** And from the cross, **"It is finished!"**

Jesus rising from the dead guarantees that our salvation is complete, the price of the sins of the world has not only been paid, but accepted by God, marked paid in full.

They were alarmed and perplexed. All of this was hitting them in one singular moment they thought was going to be full of sadness, grief, and despair. What they thought was going to last a lifetime and possibly eternity was suddenly wiped away with three words. **"He has risen!"**

The stone had been rolled away. The solving of that singular, minute problem, by the resurrection, spilled over into every aspect of their lives. They didn't have to be afraid of the Jews. They didn't have to be afraid of the Romans. They didn't have to worry that what they were putting their faith in was a lie. They didn't have to fear God, their sins, or death. Jesus' resurrection changed everything.

Whose hands have we been focusing on this morning? Whose hands have we been focusing on throughout the season of Lent? God's hands. He's held everything in them from the beginning. It was his will that Jesus come to earth, be betrayed, beaten, crucified and rise again. It was all God's will for the salvation of the world, the salvation of you and me.

As 21st century Christians we have the opposite problem as those women. Not that we're hearing this for the first time and it blows our mind, but that we've heard this truth so many times, the devil, world and our sinful flesh convince us that it's no big deal, that as we look around the world, it doesn't really change anything.

But it does. All things were in God's hands then, and still are now.

Do your words and actions make people think you are still stuck in the doom and gloom of Good Friday? The doom and gloom of your sin? Destined for hell and eternal punishment there?

Easter changes everything. Easter is why we call last Friday good, as horrible and gruesome and emotional and eyeopening and dark as it was. It had to be because of our sins. It had to be because God fulfilled what he promised he would do: Send a Savior whose foot would be crushed by the devil, but who in turn would crush the devil's head.

Things are not out of control. Things are not falling apart, well, not the things that really matter. Because Jesus rose, the things that really matter — our standing before God, the faith we share with one another, the forgiveness of all our sins and the eternal life waiting for us in heaven is all ours and can never be taken away.

Jesus' resurrection makes that a reality. Nothing can separate us from God's love. Period. Not the death of God's Son, not your death or mine either. Death has been swallowed up in victory. So live it. Live in Easter every day. Let people see this reality of this wonderful truth in your words and actions, as you make hearing God's Word and Receiving his sacrament a priority. Yes I still go to church in these difficult times! I still trust God's love and will. Let people see this reality of this wonderful truth in your words and actions, as you share with them all God has done. Let people see this reality of this wonderful truth in your words and actions, as you look to the future without fear.

If those women would have found what they were expecting to find in Jesus' tomb, our sins would still be here.

If Jesus' lifeless body had been there, all the troubles and struggles of this life would be too much for us to bear.

If Jesus' lifeless body had been there, then we've got bigger problems than the troubles and struggles of this world.

Because if Jesus' lifeless body had been there, then our future is eternal damnation.

But it wasn't there. Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. And that changes everything. Amen!