

## HE LIVES!

It's nice to see you all again! I think I haven't seen some of you since Christmas! I think that the reason some people only make it to church on Christmas and Easter is that they would rather be entertained twice a year than bored fifty-two times a year! Anyway, I'm glad you're here because I have something important to tell you—something that will simplify your lives. You see, I know you spend a lot of time worrying these days and I know what's bothering you: *you're worried about how things are going to turn out.* You worry about how your children are doing. You worry about how your grandchildren are doing. You worry about how things are going at work. If you're retired, you worry about outliving your savings. If the stock market tanks, how will that affect your retirement income? The market giveth and the market taketh away, but it usually taketh away a lot quicker than it giveth. If you're one of the people who suffer from chronic pain, will it last the rest of your life? And how about what's going on in the Mideast? In North Korea? In Washington? Is there going to be another school shooting? Or church shooting? There's no shortage of things to worry about and at one time or another I'll bet every one of you have worried about every one of them. Well, the good news I have for you this morning is that you can stop all that worrying. God is already working on your problems—He works on them every day except Sunday, of course—and He knows how to solve them. In fact, the solutions are already in place. Now if you're skeptical about that, I have a suggestion: what were the problems you were worried about ten years ago. Kind of hard to remember, huh? Somehow they either got solved or just went away didn't they? You think God might have had something to do with that?

Anyway, today I'd like you to consider how God handled some problems the women in today's Gospel lesson were worried about. Let me read the lesson again. *[Mark 16:1-8]*

### **Mark 16:1-8 Jesus Has Risen**

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

<sup>4</sup> But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. <sup>5</sup> As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.

<sup>6</sup> "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. <sup>7</sup> 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.’”

<sup>8</sup>Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

Now notice the sequence of events in this passage. Three women, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and a woman named Salome, went to purchase spices as soon as the Sabbath had ended so that they could “anoint” Jesus’ body. “Anointing” meant wrapping a dead body in strips of linen that were soaked in strong spices which would cover up the odors as a body decomposed. It wasn’t a pleasant task but it had to be done so the women set out to do it. Now keep in mind the mental state of these women. First of all, their hopes been dashed to pieces by Jesus’ death. They had expected a conquering hero and they had gotten a dead rabbi. In the second place, they had every reason to expect that Jesus’ enemies would soon be coming after them. They may have been rejoicing over His death at the time but would almost certainly target Jesus’ followers in the days to come. The fact that they were willing to perform this unpleasant duty under such difficult circumstances is evidence of the love and devotion they felt for Jesus. On the other hand, it is also evidence of the fact that they had zero expectation that Jesus would rise from the dead, even though he had repeatedly told them that he would. As far as they were concerned, it was finished, over, kaput. All that was left for them to do was to treat his remains with the same respect as they would have treated the body of any other dead Jew. So they bought the spices and early the next morning they headed for the tomb.

Along the way they realized that they had another problem: how were they going to roll back the huge stone that sealed the tomb? The type of stone that was used to seal graves was a large disc about six feet in diameter and eight inches thick. It sat in a track that ran parallel to the opening of the tomb and after Jesus’ body was placed in the tomb, it had been rolled in front of the opening to seal it. Stones like that were used to keep grave robbers out of rich folks’ graves and they were so heavy it took several men to move them. Once in place, they were extremely difficult to dislodge. The women realized that they didn’t have nearly enough strength to move the stone.

But when they arrived, their concern immediately changed from, “Who will roll the stone away?” to “Who **has** moved the stone away?” Now this is a perfect example of how God works in the lives of His people! We recognize that we have a problem and worry about how we’re going to solve it. We can’t come up with a solution and about the time we give up on getting it solved, God solves it. With Jesus, dead-ends become new beginnings! As Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount: “... *Your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.*” (Matthew 6:8)

So the women entered the tomb to retrieve Jesus’ body and instead of a body they encountered an angel who informed them that Jesus was not there but had risen from the dead and had gone ahead of them into Galilee where they would see him later. To say

the least, this was not what they had expected! They had come to the tomb filled with despair to do a job that had to be done. Now they were confronted with an entirely new reality. They feared they would find a stone they couldn't move and that God had already moved it. They expected to find the body of a false god who had failed them: instead they received good news of a risen Lord Who was bidding them to come and join him. *"He is not here; He is risen, just as he said!" (Matthew 28:6)*

The interesting thing is that instead of rejoicing, the women were terrified! *"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 women had reason to fear: Jesus' instructions were for them to go back and deliver a message to eleven cowards who had deserted their leader at the first sign of danger and were hiding in the city, expecting at any moment to be arrested. The women had no reason to think they would be treated any differently.

But did you notice that Jesus still calls them his "disciples?" The angel's words were, *"...go, tell his **disciples** and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'" (Mark 16:7)* Now this is remarkable! All eleven were traitors, deserters and cowards—yet Jesus calls them His disciples!. On the field of human battle, we honor those who show courage and hold cowards in contempt. But as usual, Jesus turns our worldly way of thinking upside down and instead of scorning the eleven He still calls them "disciples." At the Battle of Agincourt, Henry the Fifth of England called his victorious soldiers who had overcome incredible odds, *"we happy few, we band of brothers,"* while the defeated French knights wallowed in *"...shame and eternal shame."* But Jesus calls eleven cowards "brothers and disciples" and invites them once again, to follow him.

***We cannot out-sin our Lord's willingness to forgive!*** His grace abounds to all sinners at all times to repent of their sins and have them washed away in the tidal wave of his mercy and love. Truth be known, we are no better than those who deserted Him when the chips were down. We desert Him every time we lie awake and gnaw our teeth over how this or that problem will be solved. We desert him every time we doubt His Word that he will never abandon us but will abide with us until the end of the age. Yet He still calls us His disciples and invites us to follow Him. Our God is not only a God of love and mercy and righteousness, he is a God who keeps His promises. He solved the women's problems, He solved his disciples' problems, and He will solve your problems.

All we need do is remember the words of the angel in the tomb: *"He is not here; he has risen, just as he said!" (Matthew 28:6)*

He has risen indeed!

Amen.