

## **SERMON – SUNDAY 12 APRIL 2015**

**READING:** Mark 16:1-8

I found Mark's version of the resurrection very interesting, hence my reason to preach on it. It gives so much detail of the women's encounter at the empty tomb.

So, very early on the Sunday, which is the first day of the week, three women, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome went to the tomb. It was customary to arise at dawn. At least some merchants WERE already selling wares, because the women bought their spices before coming to the tomb.

Who were these women?

We know little about Mary Magdalene other than that her name indicates that she was from Magdala in Galilee. Somewhere in Galilee she met Jesus, who cast seven demons out of her. She then joined the band of disciples and followed Jesus wherever he went, ending up in Jerusalem at the foot of the cross, when all the male disciples had fled. She observed Jesus' burial and witnessed the events surrounding the resurrection. Matthew, Mark and Luke group her with the other women who went to the tomb. John says that she was the first among these women to discover the empty tomb, the first to report to the disciples, and the first to see the risen Christ as she lingered by the tomb after all the others had left.

Mary, the mother of James was also the mother of Joseph. This woman goes by several names, but in each account she appears among Jesus' faithful female disciples, standing by the cross and witnessing the empty tomb. Matthew calls her "Mary the mother of James and Joseph" or just "the other Mary" (27:56, 61; 28:1); Mark names her "Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses," "Mary the mother of Joses," or "Mary the mother of James" (15:40, 47; 16:1); in John's Gospel, she is "Mary wife of Clopas" (19:25), though she may possibly be a separate Mary.

The mother of the sons of Zebedee, is probably to be identified with Salome, according to Matthew's account of the resurrection.

Bodies were normally anointed with oil (then rinsed with water) before burial but, because Jesus had died on Friday just before the Sabbath began (at sundown, around 6 p.m.), this anointing had been postponed. Men were allowed to dress only men for burial, but women could dress men or women. Spices may not have been used for everyone but were often used for the bodies of special persons. Spices reduced the immediate stench of rapid decomposition in the hot Mediterranean days.

The Romans made sure that Jesus was really dead and really buried. They wanted to be sure that there is no way that Jesus can come out of the "cave grave" or that anyone else enters and steal his body. So it is no wonder that they put a very large stone at the entrance of the cave where Jesus' body was buried. Most probably this was done not by one soldier but at least three grown men!

No wonder then that the three women were concerned about the size of the stone! But when they approached the grave, the stone was already rolled away!

On entering the cave they saw a "young man dressed in white". In Jewish literature, angels are normally garbed in white. But these women need not have automatically assumed that this figure is an angel; the priests in the temple and some others also wore white.

The angel then knew exactly why and for whom they were looking. He said to them that because they are looking for Jesus, he is not in the grave. He has risen! He told them to go and tell Peter and the disciples as He has gone ahead of them to Galilee as He has promised.

But it seems as if they were so distressed that they just wanted to get away as soon as possible. And then Mark adds: "They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid." They had all the reason to be afraid. Women were not regarded as trustworthy witnesses!

If the original Gospel of Mark ends here, as is likely, it ends as suddenly as it began, and its final note is one of irony. Many other ancient works (including many treatises and dramas) also had sudden endings.

So what is the message of our reading?

We are also in the same position of the women a long time ago. In fact each and every Sunday we celebrate that first day of the week when the women discovered that the stone was rolled away! Jesus wasn't there anymore. God raised him from the dead.

He was alive!

He is alive!

And because of what happened in that "cemetery" many, many years ago, we shouldn't be surprised if amazing things happen to us and around us – because Jesus is alive! Anything is possible!

God rolled that stone away for all of us. And just like that he can take any obstacles in our paths away. God removed all the barriers that existed between Him and us in one merciful act of redemption.

The women were worried how they were going to get the stone rolled away – but without them knowing, God already took care of it. In the same way God can and will do the same for all of us.

If you have a big or a wee stone in your path, speak to God and trust Him to remove it, if that stone is hurting you, making you ill, messing up your life – take it to the Lord,

If you have a stone in your shoe, ask God to remove it. Because if you don't you will soon stop walking because it will become too uncomfortable. If that stone in your shoe is causing you to become reclusive, sacrificing relationships, then it is time now for you to pray to God to take it away.

If you have a big stone in your relationships, hindering you to enter into a meaningful, positive relationship with God, yourself and or other people, ask God to remove it.

If your stone is any kind of addiction, and you think it is too powerful for the Lord to take away, think again and pray more. He can and if it is His will, He will do it.

If your stone is emotional strain because someone close to you is dying, then ask God to give you the vision to see His awaiting kingdom,

If your stone is grief and bereavement, again ask God to show you that the stone was rolled away and that you can have the living hope that your beloved is not dead, but sitting at the feet of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ...

Whatever your stone is, regardless of how big it is, remember you serve an Almighty God, who can remove all the barriers in your life, who can calm and still the storms that erupt, who can ease the pain of losing someone special, who can heal broken relationships. Why? Because not even death could hold Him!

And if this morning you feel as if you are all alone in a dark place, ask God to roll that stone away. Because He can. He wants to. He wants to set us free and give us new life.

Stop worrying about what lies ahead of you. Let God roll the stones away for you, so you can truly live!

That's what Easter means.

Amen