

Mark 16:1-8 - Easter

This is the best day by far to be a pastor. Don't get me wrong it is not that I dislike being a pastor the other 364 days of the year, but there is nothing like being a pastor on Easter. Isn't the same true for all of us? What day is better than this to be a Christian, to be a believer in our Lord Jesus Christ? Easter day reminds us that our faith is not futile and that our labor in the Lord is never in vain.

There is nothing like it! That is what I tell new pastors who have yet to stand up in church on Easter morning and preach the Word of God. Again by now I pray you know that I consider it a great privilege and joy to proclaim God's Word every week, but there is nothing in the world that can compare to preaching on Easter morning. This morning I get to preach the best news of all as we look into the tomb of Jesus and find it empty. The Easter message is that our preaching is not useless, that we are not false witnesses, and that you and I are not still in our sins. The Easter good news is that those who have fallen asleep in Christ are not lost and we don't have to fear our own mortality because death has most certainly been defeated.

As we gather here today to celebrate once again the festival of the resurrection of our Lord, I want us to appreciate Easter for what it really is and all it really means. Easter is the best day. It offers the best news. It gives us the best assurance, hope, comfort, and security. There is nothing like Easter for the truth of it all is that: **Easter is simply the best!**

We go back in time now to that first Easter morning to see what makes Easter the best. We read: *"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?'"* You can almost sense the physical drain and emotional exhaustion the last couple of days had on these women who head for Jesus' tomb at the crack of dawn on Sunday. They had to look and feel defeated and deflated. Look at their emptiness: arms full of spices to anoint a dead body, eyes full of tears, hearts full of disappointment and fear. *"We won't be able to roll the stone away,"* they think. Jesus' enemies made sure the tomb was sealed and guarded. That was like pouring more salt into their still fresh wounds. With broken hearts they now even begin to question how they might even give Jesus a proper burial.

But suddenly everything and I mean everything changes forever! There will be no funeral but not because they can't get into the tomb. When the women arrive there are no guards standing watch, the stone is rolled away, and they see a young man sitting inside dressed in bright white! *"Don't be alarmed,"* this angel tells the women before they could drop their spices and run as if they had seen a ghost. *"You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him."* In the original Greek language the angel says one word that is the heart and soul of Easter's message: *"Risen!"* That is why an earthquake sent the guards running, and the angel rolled away the stone. Take a good look inside. You will

not find Jesus because He is not lying here anymore. He is not here because He is alive and still with you.

Jesus Christ is risen from the dead and this is what makes Easter the best day ever. Yes, even better than last Monday when as Kentucky fans we got to celebrate another championship. For the victory Jesus won on Easter surpasses all victories. And the message of Easter is the best news of all. In a way, the angels announces: *“Ladies, now drop your spices (you need them no more!) and run for a better reason, to announce to the world that your Savior reigns over sin, death, and the grave, and Satan has been defeated, just as he said.”* The angel even directs them where to run with this awesome news! *“Go, tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.’”*

Think about the importance of these words for just a minute. Why not send these women back to knock the socks off Pontius Pilate, King Herod, or the Jewish leaders who put Jesus to death? Why go first to a few fishermen and a tag-along tax collector? Because Jesus knew how much these disciples needed to hear this good news! Yes, Jesus still calls them His disciples. He even singles out Peter who denied Him. We might think something like “traitors” or “underachievers” would be more fitting for them. But Jesus, who still calls them His disciples, wouldn’t have it. Jesus is more interested in reassurance than revenge. He wants them to experience first hand what Easter means for them – that all their sins are paid in full – that Jesus’ resurrection is full proof assurance that God accepted the payment Jesus made for them on the cross. Jesus will fulfill His promise to meet them in Galilee. There, in Galilee, Jesus will restore them, reappoint them, and release them to work for Him.

That is why Easter is the best news of all. It is good news better than a wedding announcement, better than the news of a new baby, way better than hearing that you have the winning numbers in the big lottery. For Easter proclaims the Jesus that died for you still lives for you. Easter proves Jesus is the Son of God. Easter means that our sins really are forgiven. Easter demonstrates that death will not have the last laugh. Easter gives us hope, comfort, and security. Easter is simply the best!

It’s no secret that this church today is filled with people (like Jesus’ disciples) who have disappointed and deserted Jesus. Let it neither be a secret (it is Easter, my friends) that the resurrection of Jesus Christ means a fresh start for us all, just like the disciples. It means the bright morning of a new day when *“the Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people”* (Is. 25). Have you been lacking in your worship attendance? Have you been less than willing to give up your selfish, sinful desires? Have you ever felt like giving up on this whole church thing? Have you been disappointed with the results from doing the Lord work? Have you lost some of your zeal to serve? Have your sins & guilt weighed you down? Have you been feeling a bit defeated or deflated lately? If someone were to observe our actions and attitudes would it appear to them like Jesus is still in the tomb?

Then it is also time for us to walk again with these women to the grave of Jesus. It is time to go back to the day of Easter. It is time to hear Jesus has risen which is the best news of all. It is time to remember what Easter means for us. It is time for a fresh,

forgiven start. It is time to hear again that our sins are paid in full. It is time to hear that we are not pitied more than all people but are the most blessed people of all! It is time to realize again that we have much more than this life to look forward to and a much greater reason to live the life we have now.

For Easter means there is no reason to walk around like we are deflated or we have been defeated. Easter leaves no reason for us to ever become disappointed when the results are not what we want them to be. Easter gives us no reason that guilt or sin should ever weigh us down again. Easter means we have every reason to worship our Lord not just this Easter Sunday but every Sunday. Easter gives us every reason to stop sinning and serving ourselves and to start once again living for our Savior. Easter provides us every reason to roll up our sleeves and zealously serve Jesus even more!

Picture again how these women came to the tomb and how they left the tomb. Yes they left bewildered and for a while still said nothing. But Matthew adds they also left with great joy. They left with their lives forever changed.

Tell the best means

Amen.

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.