



3.31.24 Easter: Hope for All Creation | Mark 16:1-15 & Psalm 96:1-2, 11-13

There was a time in my life when I felt so trapped. I had no idea of what I was going to do next. At my first church job, that church had just let go of 15 positions, mine included. Budget cuts. Great.

I was pretty stressed out. Did you know that when you work for a church and are let go, you don't qualify for unemployment?

But I still had bills to pay.

Ended up working for an Engineering company as an admin assistant. Not a good fit for me. I couldn't see God at work in my life at all.

Just felt stuck, overwhelmed and hopeless. Lots of doubts and worries.

All in all, I felt abandoned by God, just thrown away.

I didn't have faith the Lord would or could do anything.

Until...the Lord did what the Lord does.

The risen Lord gave me hope, brought me new life, full of joy. Keeping a long story, short. Jesus brought me some practical helps in the form of gumption and guidance, networking, and then a new job, a church job even.

I didn't believe the Lord would help, I really didn't. But Jesus came through anyway.

It is at this point that I wish we were all at a coffee shop. And that you were buying.

With a 16-ounce Chai Latte in one hand and a warmed-up chocolate croissant in the other, it would be my turn to listen and your turn to share.

Because we all have these kinds of God stories in our lives. We have all faced setbacks. We have all felt lost, disillusioned, or helpless. Sometimes, even when we see God at work, we still struggle to grab ahold of the hope offered to us.

Friends, we must share and hear where God is at work in our lives in spite of our lack of faith, in spite of our doubts.

Do we get stuck in our old ways? Yes. Are we stubborn? I am a bit slow to learn.

It is truly human nature to not believe. It's pretty normal to doubt that the Lord will or can help us out of our current difficulty.

Thankfully, we have the Lord Jesus! Thankfully, Jesus conquered death and now we have Easter! Thankfully, we have a yearly reminder that...he is risen! **He is risen indeed.**

And because he is risen, Jesus relentlessly shows up in our lives to share with us and teach us in ever deepening ways the implications of the resurrection.

Which is new life. Which is constant hope. Which is abundant joy. Jesus comes again and again into our lives with the promise of hope and new life.

Not because we earned it or deserve it. It's based on grace. And new life not just for us but for ALL creation.

First, let's cover the resurrection because it is Easter. You came to hear that Jesus bodily rose from the dead! We are a community that proclaims...He is risen! **He is risen indeed!**

In the first three verses of Mark chapter 16, Mary Magdalene and the other women go together to prepare and anoint the body of Jesus. The Sabbath is over and they brought spices to honor Christ's body for his burial.

Imagine their grief, the weight of it. They are overwhelmed and devastated but they are rallying to do this task. They loved Jesus so much.

I'm guessing they are not thinking clearly. It is early in the morning, not my best time.

And I hear exhaustion and the brain fog that grief brings as they ask each other, **"Who will role the stone away?"** In that, **"Oh no, we didn't really think this through!"**

Did a sense of helplessness creep in with the thought that stone is too heavy move? Were they worried now that they weren't going to be able to honor his body?

What if that task of taking care of his body was the only thing holding them up, holding them together?

When grief weighs heavy, when it is fresh and raw, sometimes you just have to do the next thing. And we know taking some action, no matter how small, can help us get unstuck and help us physically, emotionally and even spiritually.

At times, and at the right time, helping us to be able to receive new insights from God, receive hope and renewed abundant life.

Back to their experience. They arrive but they see that the stone had been rolled away. Good! But Jesus' body was gone? And on top of that, there was a young man dressed in a white robe telling them about Jesus.

He declared Jesus has risen! Look for yourselves, he is not here. Now go tell the disciples he has risen just as he said.

It shouldn't surprise us that in the next verse these women are described as trembling and bewildered. In fact, they fled from the tomb. And we read, **"They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid."**

They leave frightened, unable to do as they were commanded. They didn't believe the Lord could do that. They didn't have faith.

Some manuscripts end here.

Leaving us scratching our heads, wondering, **"How did the early church emerge from this time convinced of Jesus' resurrection?"**

Because the Lord did what the Lord does.

After proving himself Lord over death and the grave, he then kept showing himself to others. He never gave up. This good news of Jesus' resurrection spread, new life was received, and a new Christ-centered community was formed.

Other manuscripts add 11 more verses to the end of the 16th chapter of Mark's gospel. And those verses help us see the Lord doing what the Lord does best with our lack of faith and unbelief.

Watch how Jesus deals with unbelief.

First, the women in verses 1 through 3 of chapter 16 did not believe Jesus had risen from the dead. They came with spices to prepare his body for burial. They saw the empty tomb but did not share that he had risen because of their lack of faith.

But now in verses 9 and 10, in the additional verses, Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene and the women do believe. Mary shared with those who had been mourning and weeping with them earlier. She shared Jesus was alive. But in verse 11 we read, **"...they did not believe it."**

After that Jesus appeared to two of them on the road to Emmaus. When he broke bread at their table, they saw him for who he was. The Lord was alive!

But when they ran back to Jerusalem and shared with the disciples, the end of verse 13 reads, **"But they did not believe them either."**

In the gospel of John, we have another example of unbelief in the face of testimony that Jesus had risen. Thomas did not believe the Lord had risen and visited the other disciples.

His closest friends told him the Lord had risen and was alive. But Thomas did not believe, until later.

Even though the women, the mourners, the twelve disciples, the two on the road to Emmaus, and Thomas did not believe that Jesus had risen from the dead; did you notice what the Lord did?

The Lord did what the Lord does. Jesus persisted and proved he had risen.

He was relentless, overcoming their unbelief again and again. And when Jesus showed himself as risen, Jesus revealed a new kind of life they could find in Him, a new resurrection life full of hope and joy.

A new quality of life, life eternal and abundant.

And this truth is so amazing, their lack of faith didn't keep Jesus in his tomb.

Don't get me wrong, Jesus wanted them and us to believe. But he kept showing up, showing them this new life. Life they could have in him.

Their lack of faith did not stop Jesus. My lack of faith does not stop Jesus.

Our unbelief does not shut him out of our lives permanently. Hinders him, sure.

But the Lord will do what the Lord does. Bring new life, hope, and joy.

The endings in Mark and the other gospels demonstrate the risen Jesus' persistence in showing up to his friends and followers.

These encounters with the living Jesus transformed a group of people from fearful and doubting into a band of bold storytellers that would change the world.

Sharing their stories of unbelief that were now turned around by the Lord's persistent willingness, in spite of their unbelief, to show them new life full of hope and joy.

Let's bring all this home for a moment.

But how is it with your own soul? How have you encountered the risen Christ lately? And how has his promised new life, new hope and new joy made headway, made inroads, made a difference in your life lately?

Has it been awhile? Are you stuck or trapped in unbelief and lack of faith?

Well, get ready.

Easter is here to remind us. He has risen. **He is risen indeed.**

And the Lord is going to do what the Lord does.

The Lord will bring you his new life.

Here comes the Spiderman speech, “With great power comes great responsibility.” At the end of Mark, Jesus charged his disciples, “**Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.**”

All creation? Not just all people?

Undoubtedly, we hear this as a call and our responsibility to share Jesus with the whole world, with other people. And it is certainly that.

But let’s consider that the phrase “all creation” is broader than the human species and is all interconnected.

The news of resurrection and new life, changed life is, indeed, for the whole of creation. Jesus is sharing now more implications of having this amazing new life in Christ.

Jesus is broadening our responsibilities.

The verses from Psalm 96 are among many in scripture that describe non-human creation praising God for God’s mighty works. We were created and commissioned to take care of and steward the earth and the animals.

How do we sometimes neglect the broader creation-wide vision of God’s redeeming work and what practical steps can we take to proclaim, in word and action, the good news to all creation?

More on that next week. It’s enough that we have started a new sermon series today entitled, New Creation. Where we will explore in a variety of ways how we can take small steps, picking up more of our responsibility to care for this planet.

But more on that next week.

Today is enough for us. For today, for now...let’s celebrate the fullness of Easter.

Help me out here as we close.

Jesus has risen!

He has risen indeed!

Time of Reflection: As we take a few moments to reflect on what we have heard;

Either thank the Lord for bringing you new life!

And/or open yourself up, welcome the new life the Lord wants to bring to you!