

Scripture: Mark 16:1-8, 15:40-47,
Text: Mark 16:1-8

The First Witnesses of Jesus' Resurrection

Beloved in Christ, we may have all kinds of lockdowns, but no one could lock down the grave. The enemies of Christ found that out the hard way. They could not. Christ is risen!

No one can lock down its life-changing witness either. No matter how hard they try. Satan tries to stamp this message out. But every time he tries, the opposite happens: it spreads further. It's like a fire. Try to stamp out the fire, it only spreads out more.

Think of China, today. Churches are being monitored today and shut down. The persecution intensifies, but the Christian faith is growing at an alarming rate. About 92 million people in China are now believers in Christ (almost 7%).

The witness of the crucified and risen Savior and Lord carries on world-wide through the centuries, now almost two thousand years later.

The witness of Christ's resurrection all began with three women at the tomb of Jesus: Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome. May we believe their witness and be strengthened in our witness. We see

1. The empty tomb
2. The angel's announcement
3. The women's commission

1. The tomb (grave) is empty

God uses these three women as His first witnesses of Christ's resurrection. This is amazing because women were often put down in those days. Their testimony was not heard; they were not allowed to testify in court.

These women were already present as witnesses at Jesus' death on the cross (vv.40-41). They also saw that He was placed in a tomb and where it was (v.47)

Yes, Jesus really died – truly so. He was not unconscious or asleep. He was not in a coma. His burial shows that He really died. This is clear in verses 42-47. Pilate, the Roman governor, certified Jesus' death and secured the tomb. Joseph of Arimathea takes the body of Jesus from the cross and wraps linens around Jesus' dead body. He laid Him in the tomb and rolled a stone against it.

That Saturday evening, the women buy their spices after 6 PM, when the Sabbath was over. The three women leave early Sunday morning to anoint Jesus' body – a way of showing deep love and respect for Him. So *"very early in the morning, on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen."*

The light has broken through the darkness. A new day, the new creation, has dawned in Jesus' resurrection! But the women don't realize it. They are going to the tomb to anoint a 'dead' Jesus. The women should have paid attention to the Lord's word which He repeated three times that He would rise again on the third day. The enemies heard it and remembered it. That's for sure! They tried to lock down the tomb!

On their way there, the women are talking among themselves, asking “*who will roll the stone from the door of the tomb for us*” (v. 3)? They are worried. It is not possible for them to move this stone of this size and weight, rolled into its groove in front of the entrance of the tomb!

Where are the men to help them? Where are the eleven, the apostles who were always with Jesus? They are all hiding; afraid of the Jews.

Who can solve their problem of rolling the stone away? God does. God has solved their problem. God has plans but never has problems. Trust Him. Their problem was solved in a way they never considered! When they arrived the stone was already rolled away!

2. The angel’s announcement (vv. 4-6)

As they turn the bend on the road, they look up and see “that the stone has been rolled away – for it was very large” (v. 4).

How the stone was rolled away, Mark does not say. But Matthew in his gospel tells “*that there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven. He came and rolled back the stone from the door . . .*” (28:3,4)

The message is that God rolled the stone away. The resurrection of Christ is entirely God’s work. As the Scripture say, “God has raised Him from the dead...” (Romans 10:9). The role of the women, our role today, is that of witness. God removed the stone so that these women could enter into the tomb and see for themselves.

Entering the tomb, the women “ . . . *saw a young man clothed in a long white robe sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed.*” Alarmed, because, first, the stone is rolled away and, second, a young man in a long white robe sitting on the right side.

The young man is an angel, a messenger of God. He is clothed in a long, white robe. He is sitting on the right side. Sitting suggests conquest. Death is defeated. The right side suggests glory and power. The angel’s position is symbolic of the risen Christ, who sits at the right hand of the Father in glory and power today. All enemies defeated.

A picture, they say, is worth a thousand words. But even a picture needs to be interpreted properly. Here is the empty tomb. Here the angel is sitting on the right side. How should the women understand what they see?

All they were seeing is death. For so many people today – all that there is, is this life. Then comes death. Life is a downward spiral. It all ends with death. There is no real hope. By believing in Christ, we see, we understand! People make up many stories (stole Jesus body, buried in Kashmir – all attempts to lockdown the message).

But the resurrection of Jesus marks the end of the death and the beginning of life, life eternal. The angel now preaches from his pulpit in the empty tomb. “*Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him*” (v.6).

He rebukes them, "You seek Jesus of Nazareth." You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth who you think is dead. You are looking among the dead. The One who was crucified is risen! He then invites them to see the place where they last saw the body of Jesus. He is not here.

The angel directs them away from death and the grave to Jesus, the same One who died by a crucifixion they witnessed, was buried in a place they witnessed, and now is risen from the dead. The same body, now glorified, raised in exaltation.

The implications are life-changing for everyone who turns from their sin and believes in the risen Christ. Life truly begins and this life never ends.

Regarding your past. In Him, you receive forgiveness of sins. In Him, your old self is crucified, dead and buried. Romans 6:4a says, *"Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death. . ."*

Regarding the present: you receive the power to live the new life with peace and joy by His Spirit who raised Him from the dead. Romans 6:4b says, *"that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."*

Regarding the future - - the promise of the resurrection of the body and life everlasting. Your body which dies Christ will raise from dead. In Romans 6:5 we read, *"For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection..."*

This is the sure hope of the resurrection – for your past, present and future – for all who believe on Christ. The Russian word for Sunday is 'Bockrecenne'. It's meaning is so full of life. It literally means, "Christ is risen!" Every time they say the word Sunday, they are saying "Christ is risen! Every Sunday is a witness!

The three women here are the first witnesses of Christ's resurrection, but also the first messengers of His resurrection. This brings us to verses 7-8

3. The women's commission

The angel said to the women, *"But go, tell His disciples..."* "Go, tell..." When there is happy news in our lives, like a new job, or a baby is born, or when a son or daughter gets married, what's the first thing we do? We go to our friends and family members and tell them!

But this is the resurrection of Christ! There is no greater message to share! Jesus has conquered sin, death and hell! He lives and so shall all who believe on Him.

But to whom does the angel commission them to tell? *"Tell His disciples – and Peter – that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you."* We see two things here.

First, the angel, God's messenger, honors these women by giving them this task. These are the women who stood by Jesus' side for three years. They served Him when He was in Galilee. They were there at His crucifixion, His burial and now here at the empty tomb.

Though all the apostles are men, for God intended it that way, God uses these fine women to bring these men back to their responsibility – to be leaders in the church. To be preach repentance and forgiveness in the name of the risen Jesus to all nations! And lead Jesus' army of witnesses!

Second, see the love and kindness of our risen Savior. At this point, no word of rebuke to the disciples, not even to Peter, who denied Him three times. Note, Peter's name is mentioned separately.

They were scattered but He will go before them into Galilee and gather them. Jesus had also told them that in Mark 14:28, *"But after I have been raised, I will go before you into Galilee."* Their failure, their sin, will not stop the risen Christ from sending them out to conquer the world with the message of the crucified and risen Savior of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Christian faith is a forward-looking faith! A faith with a vision, with hope and a future!

How do the women respond initially to their commission? Not in faith, but with fear and flight. See verse 9, *"So they went out quickly and fled from the tomb, for they trembled and were amazed. And they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid."*

That's not the kind of response we want to hear on Easter! This response connects to many people who are afraid to believe this. It means committing our entire life to Him. And this means we must follow Him as Lord and King. And following Him means to obey Him.

But Jesus is able to overcome our unbelief. Here you see the power of our risen Savior and Lord. From the other gospels, we come to know that they do come to believe. From Matthew we come to know that as they went to tell the disciples, Jesus Himself meets them. He tells them not to be afraid. Go and tell them (Mt 28:9-10). In Mark 16:9, we also read that Jesus first appeared to Mary Magdalene. She believes; she tells.

Today, the risen Lord Jesus personally encounters us through His Word and by His Spirit. Don't run from Him. Don't be afraid. Submit to Christ the Lord in faith. By submitting to Him, the result is freedom, joy and peace. By rejecting His Lordship, the result is slavery, turmoil and fear.

Today, Christ has poured out His Spirit on His church, giving us courage to bear witness to Him. Jesus is risen from the dead. He is Lord! Hallelujah! May the certainty of His resurrection crush your fear of death as you worship Him, the risen Christ. Jesus says, *"I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore."* Amen. (Revelation 1:18)

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