

The First to Proclaim the Good News

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Scripture: Mark 16:1-8

When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. ² And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. ³ They had been saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?” ⁴ When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. ⁵ As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. ⁶ But he said to them, “Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. ⁷ But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.” ⁸ So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

If you imagined that you did not know the specifics of Jesus’ resurrection and tried to form in your mind what that first Easter morning would have looked like, what would you imagined? I know it’s kind of difficult to imagine something different when you’ve heard the accounts of Jesus’ resurrection so many times.

But if you were telling people who have never heard about Jesus and you stopped in telling Jesus’ story at the point that Jesus was to rise from the dead, then asked them what they guess happened next, what do you think they would say?

Of course, it would depend on the person answering. There would be various answers. And among the various answers would possibly be how Jesus would make an amazing resurrection that would be made known to everyone as soon as possible. It would include him visiting everyone, even all the religious leaders who planned to have him killed, Pontius Pilate, the Roman soldiers who crucified him and guarded his tomb, and all who had seen him die on the cross.

On the other hand, the way Jesus revealed himself on Easter morning and throughout the days that followed were in line with how Jesus did his ministry. There wasn’t some kind of major announcement to everyone on that Easter morning about Jesus rising from the dead. In fact, only a few what happened soon after it occurred.

We are told in Matthew 28:2-4 that there was a violent earthquake, an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, shining like lightning, rolled the stone away from the tomb, and made the Roman soldiers guarding the tomb so fearful they fainted.

In the later verses in Matthew 28, verses 8-10, Jesus meets the three women who were following the angel’s instructions of hurrying to go and tell the disciples what they had seen. They fell at his feet and worshipped him. Jesus told them not to be afraid and to go to and tell the disciples to go to Galilee to where he would show himself to them.

The first to proclaim the Good News were the women Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome. But the disciples did not believe them at first. Some even went to see the empty tomb with the large stone moved that had sealed the tomb shut so no one could steal the body. Surely they wondered who could have moved that large stone. They were bewildered by the empty tomb.

We also know people who doubted Jesus' resurrection stopped doubting after seeing Jesus, touching Jesus' body, as the women did when they fell and worshipped at his feet, and as Thomas truly believed when Jesus told him to touch his scars (since Thomas said wouldn't believe until he had physical proof that was undeniable), and when he ate with the disciples, showing them that he was not a ghost, but with a body, though a new body that would never die again.

Those who would believe in Jesus after he ascended into heaven would be those who have been moved to such faith by God's Holy Spirit. We are among those who believe though we have not seen with our own eyes.

We know we are to share this Good News with everyone in every way possible. We also know that our part in Christ's mission for us in this world, along with all that we can do to love God and others, does not include us doing the actual transformation of hearts and minds to Christ. That is the work of God and the Holy Spirit. In 1 Corinthians 3:6-7b, we are told as the apostle Paul wrote: "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth...only God who gives the growth. Romans 10:12-15 reads, "For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. For, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"

That's what the 3 women did in sharing what they saw. We too are to share what we have experienced by faith in seeing with spiritual eyes and experiencing in our lives Jesus Christ who live, died and rose again for us! We are to be deliverers of the Good News in every way we possibly can. Whether it's in how we are examples to our families and friends, how we are advocates and allies to total strangers who are to be treated and loved with not only equal treatment and rights, but also with God's amazing grace and unconditional love. We proclaim the Good News in every way possible, fully trusting in God to do that work of growth, whether it's in our homes, in our community, in the courtroom, on the streets, among kindred spirits or with those who see us as their enemies. When we do the work of God in planting and watering, then we can witness and trust even more in God who does the growing. And when faith in Christ takes root, sprouts and grows, we are to be there to help with the growth, the discipleship, the building of strong, faithful, and fruitful relationships in Christ.

Surely God does things in ways we do not expect, do not understand, and even do not want. God did not come to earth as we'd expect God to enter the world and do what was prophesied and what was not foretold. Jesus did not save his creation as we'd imagine, with him suffering, dying and rising again. Jesus did not rise from the dead and reveal himself to his disciples as they'd or the world would have expected.

The first people Jesus chose to appear to right after his resurrection were the three women, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome. In the gospel of John, chapter 20, we find a different order of things, where Mary Magdalene is the focus. She arrived at the tomb, found it empty, ran and told Peter and John who go and see for themselves. Confused by what they say, the two men simply return home. While Mary is weeping at the idea of someone stealing Jesus' body, Jesus appears to her. Mary embraces Jesus, but Jesus tells her to not hold on to him since he has yet returned to see his Heavenly Father. Though there are different interpretations of what Jesus meant, some saying Jesus meant his final ascension to heaven, which happened later on, one can't help but wonder if Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome even before going to God the Father first. For we know that it wasn't until the evening of the first day of the week, according to John, that Jesus appears to the disciples.

Jesus appeared to who he wanted to appear to. Not to everyone or those we may think he should have revealed himself to. It's easily argued that Jesus should have shown himself to everyone so they could have the opportunity to believe.

Yet, we know that even those who saw him would find some reason to say it wasn't Jesus, or that Jesus wasn't really dead, though it was confirmed on the cross with the spear thrust into his side, and when they put him in the tomb. They didn't want to risk the results of believing that Jesus was no longer dead when it was them who has Jesus crucified. Of course, the rumor of the disciples stealing Jesus' body so they could say he rose from the dead was not going to last since Jesus showed himself to enough people. The guards who fainted and later told the religious leaders who paid the guards a lot of money to spread lie that the disciples stole Jesus' body while they were sleeping (Matthew 28:13). Of course they were all shocked when Jesus appeared to so many over a period of time beginning that Sunday morning. We read in 1 Corinthians 15:6 that Jesus appeared to more than 500 people at the same time at one point.

Interestingly, the ones who believed right away who were the first to proclaim the Good News of Christ's resurrection, the very women who Jesus first appeared to. Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome surely were frightened and confused, but they did not question that it was Jesus when he appeared to them.

How awful it must have felt for Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome to have the disciples doubt them when they said they saw Jesus for themselves. Jesus even said that some would doubt, but more out of shock than true unbelief since they were still soaking in that Jesus was back from the dead. In fact, we find later on, after Jesus had appeared to the

disciples, that some of them returned to fishing for fish rather than people. And Jesus had to remind them what he called them to do.

God chose these 3 women of faith to help us see how God chose to unfold the resurrection, to see God in a way that we otherwise wouldn't, to experience Christ and how he chose who to reveal himself to first, and how the first to see and proclaim the greatest news of all time were these 3 women who loved and let nothing stop them from to care for Jesus' body. It was the third day because they observed the sabbath, Saturday as was the Jewish day of rest, and waited until it was over. The sabbath began at sunset on Friday and ended at nightfall on Saturday. Though we observe the day of rest and worship on Sunday, the first day of the week is considered Sunday, not Monday. So, the seventh day on which God rested and commanded that we observe the sabbath is Saturday.

It was early on Sunday morning that the women were prepared to enter the tomb to anoint Jesus' body. They went to anoint Jesus' body, to fulfill the entire burial preparations. We have to see the devotion and love that Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome had since they went to anoint Jesus' body even though they didn't know how they'd roll away the large stone to the entrance of the tomb. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus did a lavish but hasty job of it since it was nearing sabbath. I read John 19:38-42 recall what happened.

³⁸ After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body. ³⁹ Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. ⁴⁰ They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. ⁴¹ Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. ⁴² And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

Even though Jesus told them in several ways that he'd rise again in three days, they did not fully understand. In their grief, trauma and shock, they mostly likely did not remember. Even if they did remember, they acted with a way that fit what they knew to do, what they remembered to do. And that was to complete a proper burial ceremony for Jesus. Sometimes when people are in such a grief and shock-stricken state, doing that which they know to do, were taught to do, that are part of tradition and faith are what they naturally fall back to doing. They also went to anoint Jesus because of love. They all experienced Christ's love, as so many did who knew, as they followed and placed their faith in him.

We are among those who have experienced the love of God through Jesus Christ. God's Holy Spirit allowed for us to grow in faith because there were people in our lives that planted those seeds of the Good News of Jesus Christ in us! We were nurtured in the faith, with continual care and discipleship of our older members of the faith community as we continued to grow by God's the power and grace.

We continue to proclaim the Good News that was first proclaimed by those 3 women, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome. If you haven't noticed, I've said their names repeatedly. I have done so for a very intentional purpose. In the Bible, the names of the men are carefully recorded and used to remember families and generations. When the names of women are mentioned, even once, it's a powerful sign of how significant they were. Though all the women of the Bible and history, name or unnamed are no doubt significant and vital, since without most all the women in the Bible, there wouldn't have been any children or men, I do my part in making sure we see how God chose women to do that which no man could do, including bringing Jesus into the world!

To raise up any group of people, especially these 3 women, does not diminish others. It's when a minority are lifted up that, such as women who are underrepresented throughout history, that we see more of what God wants us to see.

In light of these women of faith and the first evangelists, we can remember how in doing our part as members of the body of Christ we are being faithful witnesses to those God has placed in our lives, on our paths of life, and even in crash courses of conflict. So, when you think of your part as living letters of Christ for all to read through experiencing you and your faith and love in Christ, remember that in honoring Christ in all you do will be the very thing that allows for God to meet you, surprise you, and work in and through you to proclaim the Good News to others. As you seek first God's kingdom and will in your life, as you seek to truly love God and others, you will experience Christ more and more so that you can't help but testify that Christ is risen, that Christ is alive, and that Christ lives in and through you to reach and live within others too! Let us always live in the hope, joy and celebration of Easter, the celebration of our risen Savior who offers salvation to all. Amen.

This Week's Praise:

We thank God for the healthy birth of Tim and Kim Bodenmiller's grandson, Jude Elias, born to proud parents, Chris and Avery Brown, on Wednesday, 8# 3oz, 19.5"