

## “He Is Not Here”

Mark 16:1-8

Christ is Risen!! He is Risen indeed!! Alleluia!!

The joy of Easter! The triumph of this day! We celebrate the empty tomb; we celebrate the risen Lord. The angels proclaimed to the women who went to the tomb, “You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here.”

You, who have come to God’s House to celebrate this greatest day of the year, “You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen, and He *is* here.” What a joy that we do not have to search for the Savior of the world. He has risen, and He *is* here.

On Maundy Thursday, we talked about the reality of Christ being present here in the bread and wine. We get to participate in a miracle every time we gather together. This is no half-hearted symbolic gesture. This is God in action – for you.

On Good Friday, again, we saw that Jesus does not offer up a half-hearted symbolic gesture for the forgiveness of sins. He offers up His real hands and feet to be pierced. He offers His real blood to be poured out. His life really did end. The Son of God really died on the cross.

And very early on the first day of the week, the women went to the tomb and the stone has already been rolled away. Christ is risen!! He is risen indeed!! Alleluia!! We joyfully proclaim “He is risen indeed!! But how do we know? There are many in our world, especially in recent generations who read this “story” and ask, “How do you know it is true?” “What is the evidence?”

Why didn't God leave evidence for future generations? He did. He left an empty tomb. In the past few months especially, here at Our Redeemer, we have been talking about the evidence of the empty tomb. There was an empty tomb in Jerusalem on the Sunday morning after Passover. Even the enemies of Christ and His church agreed that the tomb was empty. As the angel said, “He is not here.”

Mark writes his Gospel about 20 years after Jesus death and resurrection. By that time, all the Roman world is talking about Jesus of Nazareth and the empty tomb. It is THE topic of conversation – even among the pagans. Jewish and Gentile historians from the 1<sup>st</sup> Century like Josephus and Tacitus speak of Jesus of Nazareth and His followers claim that He rose from the dead.

Numerous eye-witnesses claim that He rose from dead, and these eye-witnesses were killed for maintaining the claim that Jesus rose from the dead. And they, as a group, died at the hands of unbelievers because they would not change their story,

and none of the remaining disciples who saw the resurrected Christ ever changed their story – even under the penalty of death. And there are thousands of copies of these eyewitness accounts from very early church times.

There was an empty tomb. And no one claimed there was a body still in the tomb, or they would have produced the body. The only other “story” circulated is that the disciples, under the cover of darkness, rolled the big stone away without making a noise and they stole the body while all the guards were sleeping on duty.

When you weigh the balance of credibility, there really is only one account of the empty tomb that makes any sense. Jesus of Nazareth was a real person who lived in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century. There is more evidence to support that than you will find for even a Roman Emperor being a real person. If you doubt that statement, come talk to me this week and I will walk you through the evidence.

This Jesus of Nazareth was crucified under the authority of Pontius Pilate. There is a mountain of evidence to support the reality of this historical event. On the Sunday after He died, there was an empty tomb in Jerusalem for everyone to see, and by that Sunday afternoon, everyone in the city was talking about these things. Jesus of Nazareth rose from the dead. There is no other explanation for why the tomb is empty. Christ is Risen!! He is Risen indeed!! Alleluia!! As the angel said, “He is not here.”

Just like His body and blood in which you participate really is here under the form of bread and wine – and that this is not some half-hearted, empty, feel-good ceremony. Christ is here. But at the tomb, He is not here. He is risen.

Just like the nails in His hands and feet were real, and were meant for you and me, but He took that burden we could not carry upon Himself. That gracious gift from God is real. Forgiveness for your sins is real. The empty tomb is real.

The empty tomb and the eyewitness accounts of Jesus rising from the dead is a reality you need to wrestle with. If what I am saying is true, then nothing else in the world deserves more of your attention than what we are doing here today and what we will be doing here next Sunday, because every Sunday is a celebration of Easter. Christ rising from the dead deserves your utmost attention – and there is no close second. We are Easter people.

The people of God come together every Sunday and celebrate the empty tomb. The good news is that the reality of the empty tomb is meant for you and me also. Just as He is risen from the dead, so will God raise up all of His children. We celebrate the empty tomb of Jesus, because being “in Christ” the grave cannot hold us either. We proclaim Christ is Risen!! He is Risen indeed!! Alleluia!! in the sure confidence that this body will rise again. Amen.