

Lake Cities Community Church
Pastor Craig Schill
January 10, 2010
Series: On Your Mark

“What if?”
Overwhelmed with the Resurrection of Jesus Christ
Mark 16:1-8

Is there anyone here who is overwhelmed? Overwhelmed with life, with work, with kids? Sometimes I come home and the kids rush me – not with “Dad we love you and are so glad you are home.” But with, “Dad – the toilet is stopped up again, the dishwasher is leaking, Hudson and Taylor are fighting” ... and Aghh! I get overwhelmed. If you are feeling overwhelmed then we have a great passage for you today – a very overwhelming passage in every way. What is more overwhelming than the resurrection.

Think fresh with me. What if Jesus really did rise again from the dead? What if it is true, that Jesus - who was really, really, dead, came back to life? What if that is true? After all it is not common for a dead person to come back from the dead. It is a very rare occurrence.

Imagine if someone famous who has died recently really came back from the dead – I mean the real person – There would be terror in the land – because resurrection is so far outside the box – so far outside our expectations. We would not have the capacity to deal with the reality of it. Our experience is that death is pretty permanent. Like they say – the only two things you can count on are death and taxes.

Harry Houdini, the great magician, was fascinated with death and the afterlife. Before he died he promised his wife that if there was any way for him to communicate with

her from the other side of the grave he would do it and he gave her a secret code to authenticate the message. So, for ten years, on the anniversary of his death, October 31st, on Halloween, Mrs. Houdini held séances to try to contact her husband – it never worked. They tried for 10 years, and Harry Houdini was silent. She offered a 10,000 reward. Nothing. Death is permanent.

Can God raise someone from the dead? Sure, God can do anything, but read from Genesis to Revelation to see how many times he actually did it. It is not very common. I counted seven people, besides Christ and besides those unnamed were raised from the dead in all of Scripture. It is more rare than snow in Dallas on Christmas – I mean once in a great while someone is raised from the dead.

Have you seen the new Sherlock Holmes movie? I love Sherlock Holmes and grew up on the old Basil Rathbone movies. It is based on the story of the villain, a criminal, who clearly dies and then, with witnesses, rises from the dead, the stones burst forth from the grave and everything - and out he walked. And the people are overwhelmed and terrified. ...Now I don't want to give away the movie– but I think I can tell you (*...it was a trick*). He didn't really die! He didn't really rise from the dead. The skeptic would say resurrection from the dead is impossible. And as Christians we would have to admit, though possible, it is pretty uncommon.

Subject / Text

We return this morning after a several week break, to our study in the Gospel of Mark. Our passage is Mark 16:1-8, please turn there. We are going to see in our text three women who begin the story overwhelmed with one thing, and end up overwhelmed with

something very different.

Context

As you find your place, let me set the context. Jesus has been arrested, tortured, killed and buried. It is Sunday morning, the third day after Jesus' death. And let me make the observation that the disciples are gone. Peter, James and John are not here. Andrew and Thaddaeus are elsewhere. Recall the finality of the comments in Mark 14 and verse 50, "And they all left Him and fled." Jesus' ministry was bankrupt. His most flamboyant follower, Peter, denied Jesus in such a strong and unequivocal way, that it is recorded in all four gospels. In other words, the Jesus experiment at this point is over.

But not quite over... as we saw a few weeks ago the chapter 15, verses 40-41 there is always a remnant: "There were some women looking on from a distance...they used to follow Him and minister to Him, and there were many other women who came up with Him to Jerusalem." Praise the Lord that there is a steadfastness of love and devotion in the hearts of women that is seldom found in men. And those women now begin our story, verse one:

Overwhelmed with Natural Life

Mark 16:1 When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the *mother* of James, and Salome, bought spices, so that they might come and anoint Him. The Sabbath ended on Saturday night, but because of the darkness, they wait until Sunday morning to take their spices to anoint Jesus' body. Mark is giving us a clue here that these three women do not believe, expect or hope for anything to do with resurrection. They are not

wondering, “What if He is able to rise from the dead? Do you remember He said He would?” They are not going to the tomb with any hope for resurrection. The purpose of the spices and the anointing is not to preserve the body, but to cover the stench of decomposition. They are expecting rotting corpse, which they are going to attempt to perfume for the sake of their love of Him. That is their purpose.

So...Verse two: [Mark 16:2](#) Very early on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen. [Mark 16:3](#) They were saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?” This is Mark’s second clue that they are not expecting a resurrected Jesus. What occupies their minds on the way to the tomb was the large rock that blocking entrance to the tomb. Tombs in those days were closed with large stones. I would guess they felt there was a 90% chance they would get there and because of the large stone, have to turn right back around and go home. But at least they could say that they tried.

These dear women have no capacity to believe in resurrection. They are not even wondering “what if” Jesus rose from the dead. They are – we could say - overwhelmed and concerned only with the things of this world. They are focused on death, funeral arrangements, spices, and large rocks. How about you? Are you focused on only what you can see, feel and experience? Are you overwhelmed with only the temporal? Have you forgotten the promises of God? That is the state of our three women, but all that is about to change.

Transition verse

Verse four is a transition in our story. [Mark 16:4](#) Looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away, although it was extremely large. The stone, the Greek tells us was extremely large (*megas sphodra*). The problem that had occupied their mind it turns out was a large problem – but it is now a moot point.

And so (I believe) they begin to wonder if someone has stolen his body. Have you ever come home to find your garage door open? To find your front door wide open? And you think, “Did I forget to close that?” And immediately you fear that thieves have come – and you check if your valuables are in place. This is what the women are likely thinking.

What they don’t know is that we are at a transition in our story. A transition between the natural and the supernatural. A crossroads between what is expected and what is unexpected. The contrast of life and death, earth and heaven, weakness and power. Whatever occupied their minds in verses 1-3 is about to be blown to bits. Remember that old show the Twilight Zone? They are about to enter the Twilight Zone – to enter another dimension of sight and of mind. Verse five.

Overwhelmed with the Resurrection

[Mark 16:5](#) Entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting at the right, wearing a white robe; and they were amazed. They enter into the tomb and they see a young man in a white robe. But it is not just an average guy – there is something about his appearance that causes Mark to use a Greek word that is only found in his gospel: The word is translated in my version as amazed, the NIV translates as “alarmed,” the NLT as “startled”, Holman Christian “amazed and alarmed” and the old King James, “affrighted.” The definition is “to

be moved to a relatively intense emotional state because of something causing great surprise or perplexity, *be very excited to be overwhelmed, be alarmed.*" (BDAG, p.303). The only other place the word is used in of Jesus' agony in the garden.

We know from other accounts that this was no ordinary man but an angel. I have never come into contact with a supernatural being – and I would guess most of you have not either – safe to say that if you or I do, or if you have, it would be a completely overwhelming experience, as it is for these three ladies.

The angel knows this and speaks words of comfort, verse six: *And he said to them, "Do not be amazed; you are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who has been crucified. He has risen; He is not here; behold, here is the place where they laid Him.* The angel represents God's grace and mercy. God does not leave these faithful followers to wonder if Jesus' body has been stolen. The angel says, "I know who you are and what you are doing here. You are looking for Jesus – the dead person, who was crucified. But (obviously) he is not here. Where is He? He is risen from the dead." And the angel shows the women the evidence of the empty burial place. No body.

Having demonstrated Jesus' resurrection from the dead, the Angel now has an assignment for the women, verse seven: *Mark 16:7 "But go, tell His disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see Him, just as He told you.'"* The angel uses two imperative verbs in a row – go and tell. Do not linger here in the tomb – go out of the tomb, find the disciples and tell them Jesus is risen! Make arrangement to meet Him in Galilee. Go back where it all started, perhaps back to Peter's house. And the angel ends his message with a small but important rebuke – go do this... *"just as He told you."*

One lesson from this passage is that we become overwhelmed with the wrong things because we forget God's promises. Over and over, more frequently as his death grew closer, Jesus taught openly that he would be arrested, tortured, killed and then three days later, would rise again. God promises you and I many things, but often we listen with no intention of applying. We hear Jesus' promises of peace, joy, help, but we ignore them, until God reminds us that in fact the promises are real and available to each of us.

And so the angel has said all he is going to say. How do the ladies respond? [Mark 16:8](#) They went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had gripped them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid. First they flee from the tomb. They are not running to obey the angel. The word means to run from a place of danger to a place of safety. Apparently the angel's attempt to comfort them didn't work so well. They were literally shaking with fear and astonishment. The word astonishment means "a state of consternation or profound emotional experience to the point of being beside oneself (BDAG, 309)." I am not a doctor but it appears that they are in a state of shock or panic. Completely and totally overwhelmed.

How are we to interpret this? Interpreting verse eight is an issue of debate. Is verse eight a negative commentary on faithless women who, like the disciples before them wallow in fear, rather than living in faith? Like the bumbling Peter at the Mount of Transfiguration, or the disciples when Jesus calmed the stormy sea? Or is this a positive ending with God's glory breaking forth in all its power and is naturally going to overwhelm humans? One commentator wrote, "The amazement of the women turns into trembling, astonishment, fear, flight, silence. All of these are considered in the Bible to be appropriate

and normal human responses to the appearance of God, to a messenger from God, or to an event in which God's power is released."

My answer is yes. I believe Mark is communicating both. The negative lesson of this passage is do not live your life in unbelief. Do not live your life denying the promises of God. Do not be like the disciples and like the women who miss Jesus' message. Do not be so consumed with the large stones in your life that you completely surprised by God's work. The negative lesson of this story is a common theme in Mark, and that is a lack of faith. Disciples are called to believe the impossible, but we often live by sight rather than live by faith.

But the positive lesson of this story is that these three women move from being overwhelmed with the things of this world to being overwhelmed with the things of God. IN other words, "It is OK for God to leave you speechless from time to time!" In fact, "When is the last time you were overwhelmed with the glory of God?" When was the last time you were moved in the core depth of your being because God was that real to you? It is not something that happens every day, but once in a while God reveals His power and presence to us in such a way so as to shock us into worship. I pray that might happen to you and to LCCC this year.

Let me conclude with this illustration. Over the Christmas holiday Tammy and I went with our family to the Phoenix Zoo. Next time you go to the zoo, notice where the lines are the longest and where people take the most time in front of the cages. People tend to walk briskly past the deer and antelope, only a passing glance at their graceful beauty.

Families with children might stop for a look at the seals and monkeys. But they are not the main attraction.

But most of us find ourselves irresistibly drawn to the lions, the tigers, the elephants and the gorillas. Why? Because it is fascinating to consider something so much bigger and stronger than ourselves.

Our souls are starved for a sense of awe that both reminds us of our humanity and God's glory. In the resurrection we find God's power on display – let it overwhelm you and comfort you. What if Jesus really did rise from the dead? He did. And it is overwhelming.