

Monday will come and go but Sunday is here to stay Mark 16:1-8

- I. I again want to welcome everyone on this day of all days when we celebrate what is at the crux, the very heart, of Christianity. I want to tell you just how important this day is. If Jesus really rose from the dead two thousand years ago then truly might doesn't make right, forgiveness is available even to the most prolific of sinners, and death is not the end but the beginning of a life even greater than the one we are living now. But if He didn't rise from the dead, all of His teachings should be questioned. Like maybe turning the other cheek just opens us up to more abuse...maybe we should hate and harm our enemies before they harm us. And then perhaps the grave is simply that...the period at the end of our short, often pain-ridden lives. If Jesus didn't rise from the dead, His promises are as empty as the nutritional value of a Reese's Peanut Butter Egg. And we shouldn't be here this morning, but should be knocking some small white ball around on the golf course, or still in bed from a sugar coma from eating too many Reese's Peanut Butter Eggs...or at Starbucks guzzling down a Vanilla Bean Frappe. But as I say every year, I believe Jesus has risen. I believe He has risen indeed. I believe this with my whole being. In fact, I have staked my life on it. I think many of us here have, too. Regardless of what you believe, we are glad you are here...even if it took some twisting of arms or promises of Easter brunches to get you in our comfortable metal chairs. We do hope you find this time meaningful wherever you find yourself on your spiritual journey.

- II. I am not sure how many of us have heard of Dr. Tony Compolo but I find him to be one of the most thought-provoking, sometimes disturbing, yet engaging speakers I have ever heard. Among many things, including being a professor and a sociologist, he is the associate pastor of Mt. Carmel Baptist Church in Western Philadelphia. Although Tony is white, the church is predominantly African American. As he tells the story, years ago he was part of what he describes as a "preach off." This is where they have 3 or 4 preachers preach back to back...and see who is the best. Now as Tony says, they don't really refer to it in that way and if pressed they will say it's all for the glory of God, but in reality, everyone knows the score. It's a preach off. So Tony is in one of these competitions in a Good Friday service. And he preaches second to last. He says on that day he preached his heart out....and as he puts it, he was good. Not just good but he said hit it out of the ball park. As Tony says, in most churches you really can't tell how you are doing preaching-wise. All you can say is whether or not most of the people stayed awake. But in his church it's a little different. He had the men on their feet, shouting, "Preach it, preach it!" The ladies in the church were standing up shouting, "Well, well!" with their hands fluttering in the air. And the whole congregation was yelling, "Amen!" And at the end, as he put it, the whole church about exploded with applause. So as he sat down and his senior pastor looked at him and said something like, "You did alright! You do alright!" Tony said with a smile, "Well, Pastor, do you think you are going to be able to top that?" The elder pastor said "Sooooon. Sit back. Because the old man is going to do you in." Tony goes on to say that his pastor did just that. He killed it. And he did so with only five words. Just five words. Five words that he repeated over and over for about an hour. But with those five words, he brought the house down. Ready for it? He preached, "It's Friday but Sunday is Coming" Here is a short excerpt:

It's Friday Jesus is praying
Peter's a sleeping
Judas is betraying
But Sunday's comin'

It's Friday
The disciples are running
Mary's crying
Peter is denying
But they don't know
That Sunday's a comin'

It's Friday
The world's winning
People are sinning
And evil's grinning

It's Friday
But let me tell you something
Sunday's comin'

I can't even begin to do that justice but just to humor me, can I get a "Preach it" or an "Amen"? Thank you. Well, that sermon indeed brought down the house. It has again and again over the years because it like verbal dynamite. It contains so much power in such a small package. So much truth in only a hand full of words. And I say to you today that Friday with Jesus hanging on the cross is past and Sunday is finally here. The Tomb is empty and the stone has been rolled away. **(image)** But we get ahead of ourselves. Before we go any further, let's look through Mark's eyes at the events of that first Easter.

III. Mark 16:1-8 NIV. Notice a few things with me. Who was it that had enough gumption to show up at the tomb? The ladies! Peter the bold, the same guy that leaped out of the boat to walk on water, and his male counterparts were still hiding under their beds...thinking they were next on the Romans' hit list. So women in Mark's gospel are the only ones with Jesus from the foot of the cross to the grave. All the male disciples with the exception of maybe John fled the scene. Does this surprise us? Living in a predominantly female household, it doesn't me. Several years ago my family and I went tent camping. After taking a day trip, we returned to our campground and were met by the camp host telling us that we had to immediately move our tent as someone else had reserved that site. I quickly surrendered and said "ok" with my head down and started heading back to pack up. But one member of my family whom I will not name didn't budge. She clearly stated to the camp hosts that we were not going to move anywhere as it was our site. The female host, now livid, said she was going to call the park ranger and have us physically removed. This woman in my family whom I will not name said essentially, "Go ahead punk and make my day!" It about came to a fistfight, let me tell you. So, no, this part of the story makes complete sense to me...the women having courage rather than the men.

IV. So who were these women? There is some question as each gospel gives us a slightly different list. But the right answer here always is “Mary”. Mary Magdalene whom Jesus freed from spiritual oppression, Mary the mother of James (nicknamed James the less...imagine going through life with that nickname!) and Salome who is also referred to as Mary in some traditions. But what is the significance of women discovering Jesus’ empty tomb? First, it gives strong evidence that this story wasn’t made up, because if it were, the would-be plotters would have men not women discovering the tomb. Why? Women were second-class citizens at the time. They were not trusted by larger society so to have women discover Jesus’ empty tomb would hurt the credibility of the story. But second I believe it doesn’t just point to the gospel’s authenticity, it points to the truth that Jesus was the Savior of the disregarded and overlooked. How ironic that the greatest discovery in history was made by those who were not able to give testimony in court. I don’t think that was accidental on God’s part. God who is the champion of the underdogs.

V. The second thing I would like to point out is that as brave as these women were, once they were told by the young guy in white (who was either an angel or an edgy dresser) that Jesus had risen, they lost it. It was kind of like that for me a few Sundays ago. I was waking up from a post-sermon nap on the couch. I got a text from Megan my wife that she was at the store. She asked me to go see how much milk we had. I went and checked the milk. She then asked me about the cereal situation. So I got up again and checked the cereal. And her food inventory continued like that, making me do couch aerobics. She finally asked me about razors or toilet paper or the like. So I headed to our bathroom. I threw the door open and about jumped out of my skin. There was a woman in my bathtub!! A scandal, right? Well actually, no. It was Megan. It scrambled my brain. She was at the store so how could she be here? That’s when she said with a big smile on her face, “April Fools!” I felt both foolish and dumbstruck. But this doesn’t even touch what those women must have felt that first Easter morning. I think what they felt was more akin to the following story. A couple of years ago in Argentina a mother gave birth to her baby two months prematurely. The infant was declared dead at birth. The hospital placed the baby in a coffin and put her in the morgue. Twelve hours later the grieving mother was allowed to go see her child. When she opened the coffin much to her shock she found her baby very much alive. Can you imagine the relief, the joy, and probably a bit of fear? How can this be? The dead don’t rise again. I imagine her reaction was similar to the folks in our video and very much in line with the women on that early Sunday. But for many of us who have heard the Easter story countless times, it has lost its kick. We need to remember that people rising from the dead was as unheard of then as it is now, and it would have shaken even those brave women to the core.

VI. The third thing I want to point out is this. The earliest church traditions tell us that Mark’s gospel ends at verse 8. Verses 9-19 were added on later. If you have a bible, check it out. This is not to say that the other verses are wrong, but simply that the original author Mark most likely ended the story with **NIV 16: 7-8**. We might say that is kind of a lame way to finish the story. Why didn’t Mark, like the other gospel writers, include Jesus appearing to the disciples and have a more Hallmark kind of ending? Couldn’t he spare the extra papyrus? He didn’t have to go all *War and Peace* on us, but he could have at least included a few more lines. Like having Jesus give all the Mary’s a high five and Peter a bro-hug

before ascending into heaven. That would have been nice. The other three gospels tie up the story with a bow but Mark kind of leaves things hanging. But the more I reflect on it, maybe Mark in a way was saying something profound by leaving the story open. Because in a real sense Jesus' resurrection wasn't the end of the story but the beginning...that continues with you and me here this morning.

VII. If the tomb was empty and Jesus was raised from the dead, as we see in Mark 16, then everything has changed. Not just then, two thousand years ago, but for us now. "How?" we might say. Friday is past, Sunday is here but let's be real...*Monday is coming*. If Sunday represents the day of victory over sin and death, Monday represents the return to the day-to-day drudgery of real life. Monday is the day reality sets in. Monday is the day we go back to school, back to work, back to the problems we face. Back to the addictions we can't overcome or the depression that won't go away. It's the day of getting up too early, going to bed too late, homework to do and assignments to complete. Monday is the day we get the call from the debt collector for bills we can't pay, or the call from the doctor telling us it's cancer. Monday is the day we have to deal with that irritable boss or disgruntled employees. Monday is the day we must face broken relationships, broken hearts, or crushed dreams. Sure, we might all shout "He has risen, He has risen Indeed" today, but today is Sunday. And in a mere short 24 short hours, it will be Monday. And real life, with all its complexities and struggles, goes on. Right? But get this. Because of the empty tomb and the risen Christ, I along with Mark say ***Monday will come and go, but Sunday is here to stay***. If Jesus is truly alive and the grave empty today on Sunday, it will be true for tomorrow on Monday, and Tuesday, and the rest of the week as well. Say what, Ron? Because get this. The miracle of the resurrection is not just that Jesus bodily came back to life; and that if we trust in Him, our sins are wiped clean. As great as these things are, just as miraculous and why every day in a real sense is Sunday is that Christ can live and dwell within us today. No longer is He limited to one body, for one time, but He now can live within any man, woman or child that calls out His name in faith. **So, Sunday...resurrection day...is truly every day if we trust in Jesus**. Even when Monday comes. Even when the call from the doc telling us it's the big C. Even when our spouse abandons us, our boss fires us, our husband beats us, our girlfriend dumps us, or when our friends reject us. Even when our addictions come calling, our mental illness won't leave us alone, or our creditors threaten to take us to court. Sure Monday is coming with all that and maybe more. But Sunday, G3 Church, Sunday is here to stay. Because He lives in here so He goes with us each and every day. And He will give us the courage, the strength, the peace to get through Monday because it's always Sunday. Can I get an "Amen"?!

VIII. As I close...we pastor-types realize that Easter is one of those Sundays when even those who don't consider themselves religious, pious, faithful, or even "Christian" might just show up. Maybe we were dragged here by a well-meaning relative. Perhaps we came with the promise of free brunch. Maybe we came to make our mom, girlfriend, or neighbor happy. And that's all ok. But before we send you on your way, just consider. What if it's true? What if Mark was right? The tomb was empty? The stone rolled away? What if you no longer have to face this life alone? What if you too could experience the presence of the God of this universe and His unconditional love and forgiveness? His strength and power? What if each and every day can be Sunday? Even tomorrow on Monday? This all can begin for you on this Easter Sunday if you put your trust, your hope, in Jesus. That He didn't just die for sin for the whole world as John tells us but He died for you and for me. Do this and Sunday, Resurrection Day, is for you, from this day forward, every day of the week. Let's pray.