



FIRST (SCOTS) SERMONS

“WHERE’S JESUS?”

Scripture Lessons: Psalm 23; Mark 16:1-8

*This sermon was preached by Dr. L. Holton Siegling, Jr. on Sunday, April 28, 2019
at First (Scots) Presbyterian Church in Charleston, South Carolina.*

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. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. They had been saying to one another, ‘Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?’ When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. 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. 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.’ 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.

Leader: This is the Word of the Lord.

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Let us pray...

Almighty and Everlasting God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of each of our hearts be pleasing, acceptable, and even joyful in your sight, for you are our Rock, and our Redeemer. Amen.

Though I was not able to participate in the Cooper River Bridge Run this year, I did manage to watch some of the television coverage; and, in addition to getting a kick out of seeing two fellows in University of North Carolina track gear jump out to an early lead, which, based upon the smiles on their faces, they had no intention of keeping, I also delighted in some of the characters that were interviewed before the race. One lady in particular, along with several of her friends, was dressed as Waldo from those familiar puzzle picture books entitled: *Where’s Waldo?* An example of a typical page in a *Where’s Waldo?* book might be a picture of a busy day at the beach, and all kinds of activities and colors sort of merge and make it difficult to differentiate much of anything, especially the character Waldo who is hidden somewhere in the picture wearing his customary red and white striped shirt, bobble hat and glasses. And, as the titled book would suggest, it is our job as readers to find out “Where’s Waldo?”

That puzzle picture book resonated with me in light of this morning’s New Testament Lesson; because, from the very outset of Mark chapter 16, we are presented with three women – Mary

Magdalene (who was the one from whom Jesus had driven seven demons), Mary the mother of James (who many scholars also believe was actually Jesus' own mother) and Salome (who was the wife of Zebedee and the mother of James and John) – the Bible tells us that these women are looking for Jesus; and, in the verses that follow, we are given some sense of where Jesus is and where he is not.

Now, for us to consider the question: "Where's Jesus?" we must keep in mind the broader Biblical witness; because, if the truth be known, God is everywhere! The prophet Jeremiah put it like this: "Am I a God nearby, says the Lord, and not a God far off? Who can hide in secret places so that I cannot see them? says the Lord. Do I not fill heaven and earth? says the Lord" (Jeremiah 23:23-24).

Indeed, we may not always feel God's presence equally at all times and in all places, but that doesn't mean that God is not there. On the contrary, when the Apostle Paul reminds us that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord, we are effectively given a blessed assurance that there is nowhere we can be where God is not also with us. But because God was especially present in the life and ministry of Jesus – in the sense that Jesus was God with us – we find in Mark's Gospel an opportunity to faithfully explore where Jesus was and is in relation to the garden tomb.

The three women I mentioned a moment ago – Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome – according to Mark's Gospel, they were the first ones to arrive at the tomb on Easter morning.

As it were, the women came with spices so as to anoint Jesus' body, which is something they would have done on Friday; but, because it was so late in the afternoon when Jesus died, and because the Sabbath observance was effectively upon them, they had to wait until now.

In the meantime, Jesus' body had been wrapped in a cloth, perhaps not altogether different from the bands of cloth with which Jesus was wrapped upon his birth. It's important to note that as the women make their way to the tomb, the Bible gives us no indication that they are anticipating the resurrection. It is as if they don't expect to find anything out of the ordinary. On the contrary, they seem preoccupied with who exactly will help them remove the stone. In other words, they fully expect the stone to be there. And that stone was a legitimate concern, given that it was probably far too heavy for them to move, even if they tried to move it together.

We know that the cave in which Jesus' body had been laid had a sufficient stone rolled in front of it – large enough that it would have taken several men to move it. "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?" they ponder. When they arrive at the garden they find that the stone has already been removed; and, who should they see, but a "young man," which in extrabiblical Jewish literature is translated as a heavenly being. The other gospel writers refer to him as an angel or angels.

This angel encourages them to not be alarmed...to not be afraid...and he points to the place where Jesus had been as evidence to the fact that he is not here – not in the tomb that is. And

the way the angel talks about this phenomenon is also important. He says that Jesus “has been raised,” which is to say that Jesus was the object of the action – that Jesus didn’t raise himself, at least that part of him that was human.

But because we read elsewhere in the Scriptures such words of Jesus which say: “I have power to lay it down (referring to his life) and I have power to take it up again” (cf. John 10), and when we read in Romans 8:11: “If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead...” which indicates the role of the Holy Spirit as well - - and so when we take the breath of the Biblical witness into account, we can safely say that the divinity of Jesus, that which in him was by nature true God of true God, along with the other two persons of the Trinity – namely the Father and the Holy Spirit – they were all active and at work in raising the Son from the dead.

And, theologically speaking, this proves to be a very important point, because we – as frail and as fallen as we are – we desperately needed God to act on our behalf, to atone for our sins. In other words, in order for sin’s curse to lose its grip as our children’s hymn put it this morning, the justice of God had to be satisfied and this is something that we ourselves simply could not accomplish. And so it happened that that part of Jesus that was perfectly human, it was called upon to pay that price – that wage of sin; ah, but the fulfilment of righteousness...that perfect life lived in obedience to God could only be done by that which in Jesus was God!

That alone is profound, but here’s what really stands out for me. Listen again to what the angel says: “But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee.” Galilee! Isn’t that interesting? Of all the places Jesus could go, he chose Galilee? Why not Jerusalem? Why not go back to Pontius Pilate; back to that basin of water and wash his own hands as if to say, “I wash myself clean of your so-called indifference.” Why not initiate another parade like the one on Palm Sunday? Don’t you know the people would have lined the streets...oh, I can hear them now: “Hosanna, blessed is the one who ‘is’ the Lord.”

Jesus has just risen like the dawn of a new day – he could go anywhere in the world...why not go back to Caiaphas’ house - the High Priest – Jesus could have gone back to that overnight prison hole in the ground, grabbed a shovel and personally started filling it in. Why not go back to Via Delarosa...why not climb Calvary’s hill and say about death, “It is finished.”

But Jesus didn’t do any of that. He went to Galilee? “So, what’s so special about Galilee?” we may ask. Well, nothing really. Granted that’s where Jesus spent the vast majority of his time on earth – it had been a home for him; but, as places go, it is not all that significant. There is no consolidation of earthly power in that place – in that region. It really is more of a hodge podge of the earth’s clientele, a melting pot if there ever was one...just a lot of people going about their business, trying to make a living, trying to survive.

Well perhaps that’s it. Maybe that is precisely why Galilee is so significant! It is where it all began...on the banks of our living when Jesus called to us the first time and said, “Follow me.” It is where ordinary people like you and I live...it is our neighborhood!

Could it be that God was effectively telling the disciples through these blessed women who came to the tomb that first Easter morning that Jesus would meet them, not in the tomb, but in

Galilee...in the community...at church and at work and at play, at the Dock Street Theater and at My Sister's House, on the baseball fields and in the board rooms, in school and at youth group!

In other words, the very God who took what those women presumed to be an ordinary task of anointing a body with spices and transformed it into an extraordinary revelation, is also the God who is out there in our everyday life, waiting for us as we take our journey, taking the ordinary, routine, mundaneness of our lives, and making of it something purposeful, something meaningful. The women knew this to be the case, and yet we are told in Mark's Gospel that, at least for a little while, they kept this news to themselves. The Bible tells us "...They went out and fled the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone..."

On this first Sunday after Easter, we, in a sense, are in those women's shoes. As we stand at the empty tomb, we too are told that God in Christ is not there anymore! He's risen. But not just risen, but that He is going ahead of us to meet us.

Oh, heaven forbid we take down the beautiful flowers and pretend that nothing has happened, or, perhaps out of fear for what others might say, we refrain from living as God's resurrected people today, tomorrow and in all the days to come.

Friends, God knows exactly where we are! For us, it is a matter of knowing "Where's Jesus?" And one thing is for sure – Jesus is not in the tomb, because he's waiting for us here and at home; he's waiting for us on those familiar streets where he has walked with us miles and miles before.

Yes, we celebrated the resurrection last Sunday, but we experience the full force of it going forward and in the midst of a faithful life lived in service to God...because it is in our daily walk that God has chosen to reveal himself.

And isn't that a beautiful image? Jesus going ahead of us to Galilee? And that it is in Galilee that we will meet him; that Jesus meets us even in this place; that by the inward witness of the Holy Spirit Jesus meets us through the reading and the proclamation of God's Word- he meets us when we gather at this table and celebrate the Lord's Supper - ah, but Jesus meets us everywhere!

Interestingly, the Gospel according to Mark doesn't waste a lot of time introducing things...there's no birth narrative...no story of Jesus in the temple when he is young...it opens with Jesus' baptism and his ministry is off and running.

In much the same way, the resurrection in Mark's Gospel is not just about the empty tomb, it is about an ongoing story of discipleship...it is about a following of Jesus which involves leaving the tomb and heading out into the expanse of God's creation. And this life of discipleship, if it is to be lived it all, it will certainly find itself in worship and in prayer and in faith, but it must also find itself in those other places we call home, places where we work – those places where we spend time with friends.

At the end of the day, will they be able to say about you and me that “We went back to Galilee and shared the wonderful news of Jesus’ resurrection?” We must do that, because while Jesus is undoubtedly here...he’s also out there, and he invites us to meet him.

Let us pray...

Gracious and loving God, we thank you for loving us and meeting us where we are; yet we know that we cannot remain there – not as we once were, not at the empty tomb – for you have determined to meet us in our life and in our life lived together. Bless us on our journey. In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

**The following sermon has not been edited by the author; therefore, there may be discrepancies. When in doubt please refer to the audio version of the sermon on this website.*