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Hutterthal Mennonite Church

Psalm 47; Mark 16

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## Resurrection

### *Opening Greeting/Prayer:*

Please join me in prayer: God of resurrection, vindication, and restoration, you raised Jesus of Nazareth from the dead, a sign – a foreshadowing of our final hope, not only in the end, but in the face of the threat of death and destruction. Your love, grace, mercy, and compassion are more powerful than death, brokenness, betrayal, and injustice. We ask you for open eyes and ears that we may imagine true life in your resurrection power. In Jesus' name. Amen.

### *Message:*

Jesus is risen! He is risen indeed! Though our Lenten series has come to an end, the practice of seeking hopefully does not lose its place in your daily walk with Jesus. We stand in the hope, power, and mystery of resurrection because our text this morning in Mark 16 will challenge our commitment to seeking God's ways and following Jesus more faithfully.

Scholars generally agree that Mark was most likely the first of the four gospels to be written not long after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE. Our oldest and most reliable manuscripts of the book of Mark end at verse 8. These are manuscripts discovered in the last few hundred years, ones that were not available when some of our oldest English translations were written. Therefore, some translations continue with the most common ending to the book of Mark in verses 9-20, but this longer ending was not the only one added to the gospel. Some

manuscripts had a shorter ending followed by this longer ending, a few only had the shorter ending, and still other manuscripts had the longer ending with markings indicating its doubtful place in Mark. However, your particular bible may or may not explain this well about the end of Mark; scholars generally agree that the shorter and longer endings were both added to the text 100 or more years after the manuscript was first written.

I offer all of this discussion to you this morning because a few people have raised concerns with me about how some of the newest translations offered today have actually eliminated certain verses from at least our oldest translations of the bible, which is true. However, the reasons for doing so are not nefarious. Archaeologists have discovered older manuscripts or scrolls of New Testament books and letters. Scholars and translators have compared those manuscripts or scrolls to ones that had been used already to translate the scriptures so that they could find the most accurate version possible.

Now, let's look at those last 8 verses. Like I mentioned last week in discussion of John's resurrection narrative, Mary Magdalene is going to the tomb, but in Mark's gospel, she is joined by Mary the mother of James and Salome. Just a few verses earlier in Mark 15, this same group of female followers of Jesus is first introduced and stands at a distance as Jesus suffocated to death on the cross. These three women had been following Jesus all the way back in Galilee. They had followed him, heard his teaching, witnessed his miraculous work and final humiliation, and were now coming the next morning at dawn after the Sabbath day to anoint Jesus. It is only while they are on the way that they ask about how they will get the stone rolled away. They are not strong enough to move the stone from the entrance, so who will move it for them?

When they arrive, they find that their worries were unheeded because the large stone has already been moved, leaving the tomb wide open. When the women look in the tomb, they only

see a young man in a white robe sitting to the right of where Jesus' body had been laid. We hear nothing of the linen cloths in the tomb as John's gospel had mentioned last week. And in this story, Mark writes that the person in the tomb is a young man, not multiple angels or even a messenger. We hear echoes in this moment of Mark 14:51-52, the only other place where Mark uses this same Greek word for young man. In Mark 14, this mysterious young man in a linen cloth escapes the clutches of the crowd that comes to arrest Jesus but loses his clothes in the process. Could that young man in chapter 14 and this young man in the tomb be the same person? Some scholars even wonder if this young man might have been the traditional author of Mark's gospel, a colleague of both Paul and Peter called John Mark. Maybe he is this mysterious proclaimer of Jesus' resurrection.

The young man tells the three women that Jesus is not in the tomb anymore; he has been raised and is headed to Galilee as he had told his disciples on the mount of Olives, also in chapter 14, just before he was arrested. As the young man finishes speaking, the three women's alarm turns to fear and terror, amazed at what they have seen and heard. They flee the tomb, afraid of what might happen to them if anyone finds out that they were the last ones at the empty tomb. Would Roman soldiers come after them for Jesus's body? Who could they talk to about it? Would the disciples believe them?

Remember that it is this moment in silence and fear that Mark's gospel comes to a close, at least its earliest scroll. Some scholars think that the women actually did go tell the disciples. When verse 8 says that they said nothing to anyone, these scholars assume that it means that the women did not say anything to anyone along the way to the house where the disciples were. I think that this interpretation might be reading a bit much into the text and might actually reflect the discomfort that we all have with the abrupt and unnerving ending at verse 8. Scholars, who

have studied all of the different endings that have been added to Mark's gospel wonder if the copyists, those who passed on these texts by copying them on new parchment over the last two thousand years, felt similarly to these interpreters. The original author of Mark's gospel does not seem to give us a neat and tidy ending.

However, in my research of this last chapter of Mark, I have found that ending at verse 8 can and does make sense with the rest of the book as it is, without additional endings or clarifying details. By ending the gospel this way, the author offers each listener and reader of Mark a rhetorical challenge. Will you respond to the risen Jesus as the women and disciples have, or will you respond differently? Remember that the disciples had deserted Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane when he was arrested by the religious leaders. Peter even goes so far as to deny even knowing Jesus 3 different times. If anything, the disciples have shown their true colors as cowards in the face of harm and suffering. Also, Jesus had already told them that he would meet them in Galilee after it was all over in Jerusalem, but would they remember that or even believe it after his humiliating death?

On the other hand, this group of three women seem to be doing the right thing in going out to the tomb to anoint Jesus with their spices. The rest of the story through proves how they have missed what Jesus had been telling them. Jesus did not need to be anointed for burial; he had already been anointed at the beginning of chapter 14 by another woman's lavish gift of nard, which she poured on his head. Mary Magdalene, Mary, and Salome knew that they could not get into the tomb on their own, so why did they think that they were going to anoint Jesus? Even when they see the empty tomb and hear the message from the young man sitting where Jesus had been laid, they are still alarmed and afraid to tell anyone. What the author of Mark's gospel at this point seems to be saying is that the empty tomb should be enough to show that Jesus has

risen from the dead as he had already told them during their travels in Galilee, but these first followers even struggled to make sense of resurrection or share it with others.

Ending in failure and fear, Mark's gospel leaves us unsettled as it has left many readers and listeners over the centuries. Each of us is left, then, to answer the author's implied question at the end of it all: will I, will we respond faithfully to Jesus' call to follow his way and live in light of the empty tomb? Will we share this good news of new life and hope with everyone, or will we desert Jesus and fall silent as his followers seemed to do at the end of Mark's gospel? I like to think that I have responded faithfully, that I have shared new life in the risen Jesus with everyone, but I know this not always to be true. In fact, more than I would like to say, I have lived and settled into a world in which Jesus's death and suffering shape my view of the world more than the empty tomb. I struggle sometimes to offer new life and hope to those around me, to live as though renewal and redemption are possible, to act as though suffering and death are not the end. Too often, I have been silent in the face of power, violence, and hopelessness as Jesus' disciples were, too.

Even in these inadequacies, the risen Jesus asks, "Will you meet me in Galilee where it all began?" When I revisit my Galilee experiences, where I have experienced the risen Jesus, I am renewed by the Holy Spirit and the possibilities of resurrection. It is when all of Jesus's disciples, including these 3 women at the empty tomb, return to Galilee and experience the resurrected Jesus that everything changes. Will you then respond faithfully to Jesus' call to return to Galilee? Will you share the good news of the empty tomb? Will you offer your friends and even enemies the possibility of new life and hope in the risen Jesus of Nazareth?

*Closing prayer:*

God of resurrection, strengthen our hearts and broaden our minds as we seek to live into your resurrection power. Help us to imagine your renewed world, to envision your kingdom family, and to live into them each and every day. Thank you for the restoring and resurrecting work of your Holy Spirit in each of our lives. In Jesus' name. Amen.