

Easter Sunday: A Conundrum, a Commission, and a Contrast

Small Group Follow-up Study for Mark 15:40—16:8

RE-READ

[15:40] There were also women looking on from a distance, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. [41] When he was in Galilee, they followed him and ministered to him, and there were also many other women who came up with him to Jerusalem.

[42] And when evening had come, since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the Sabbath, [43] Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself looking for the kingdom of God, took courage and went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. [44] Pilate was surprised to hear that he should have already died. And summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he was already dead. [45] And when he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the corpse to Joseph. [46] And Joseph bought a linen shroud, and taking him down, wrapped him in the linen shroud and laid him in a tomb that had been cut out of the rock. And he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. [47] Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where he was laid.

[16:1] When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. [2] And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. [3] And they were saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?" [4] And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back—it was very large. [5] And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. [6] And he said to them, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him. [7] But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you." [8] And they went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

RECAP

Some commentators see in verse 8 an unstated apostolic commission to you and me: "Mark [they say] uses the failure of the women to shock the reader into realizing that silence is wrong and that the proclamation of the resurrection must go on." The commission to you and me that Mark leaves unstated is made explicit by Matthew: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." The commission given to the women at the tomb reminds us of our own commission and their response encourages us not to follow their example. As one puts it, "Mark uses the negative response of the women as an implicit appeal for others to succeed where the women failed. The disobedience of the women forces the reader to realize that silence is wrong and calls on the reader to respond differently by proclaiming the good news about Jesus and his resurrection in spite of fear."

This message is reinforced as we consider the meat of the Markan Sandwich that is our text. Mark wants us to think deeply about Joseph of Arimathea as we consider how we might respond to the commission that we have received. In going public about his faith, Joseph of Arimathea risked facing scorn from the common populace, charges of treason from the powers that be, and the very real possibility of being expelled from his social group (the Sanhedrin). O that we might be willing to risk the same!

RESPOND

1. What caught your attention from Sunday's sermon? What are you still thinking about/mulling over? What questions did Sunday's sermon raise in your mind that you would like to discuss?
2. Who decided to go to the tomb on Sunday morning to anoint Jesus' body? Why is it significant that it was these women and why note that they came to the tomb once the sun had risen (v. 2)?
3. Why is it significant that they were commissioned to tell Jesus' disciples and Peter that he was going to meet them in Galilee? What are we to make of their silence as recorded for us in verse 8?
4. The text tradition after 16:8 is somewhat divided. Commentators James A. Brooks, James R. Edwards, and William L. Lane agree that verses 9-20 are not original to Mark. If this is true, what thinkest thou of this ending to the gospel? Does this textual issue pose a problem for Christianity's belief in the resurrection of Jesus?
5. How can we keep from saying nothing to anyone? How might we make our evangelistic involvement both individually and corporately more deliberate?
6. Given our conversation tonight, what should we be praying for ourselves and for our church?