### “The Holy Spirit with Power” Steve Finlan for The First Church, Easter, March 31, 2024

**Mark 16:1–8**

1When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. 2And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. 3They had been saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?” 4When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. 5As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. 6But 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. 7But 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.” 8So 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.

**Acts 10:34–43**

34Then Peter began to speak to them: “I truly understand that God shows no partiality, 35but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. 36You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all. 37That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: 38how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. 39We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; 40but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, 41not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. . . 43Everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

Welcome on this beautiful spring day, and Happy Easter! We’ve been building up to this day, going over what Jesus experienced in his last week here, and examining our own spiritual lives. Now we have this greatest day in the calendar, and I want to shout: I know my Redeemer lives!

For the lesson today, the Scriptures are in chronological order. So we begin with Mark’s account of the Resurrection. It’s the only one of the four gospel accounts that breaks off, actually in mid-sentence, before the appearance of the risen Jesus. It seems that the original ending of Mark has been lost. Instead of an actual appearance of Jesus, the women get a *message* of the Resurrection from a young man—probably an angel—who says, “He has been raised; he is not here” (16:6). What are they to make of this? Their attention and interest are aroused. They don’t know whether the body has been taken, or whether they should believe the angel’s report that he has risen. They are frightened.

So it is an empty tomb story; the risen Jesus himself does not appear. Of course, silence can speak volumes, and an empty tomb speaks volumes. But Christians weren’t satisfied with this as an ending. Some scribes later added endings to Mark, the so-called Shorter Ending and Longer Ending, but no scholar believes those were part of the original version. What we get from Mark ends in mid-sentence in verse 8. What was lost? Probably there was a Resurrection appearance, in line with what the angel says, but we don’t really know.

It’s distressing to us that one of our founding documents, the Gospel of Mark, seems to have been damaged very early on, and part of it lost. We don’t like to see an *accident* having an effect on such an important work. After all, it’s the Bible!

After this reading, you’re left wanting more, especially if you’ve read the other three gospels. Maybe we’ll get a little more from Acts. Acts also testifies to the Resurrection, as we see in the speech by Peter. He shows the open-heartedness that is crucial to the gospel, saying “in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him” (10:35). Good deeds are emphasized, and they are mentioned again when Peter says Jesus “went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him” (10:38). Peter was a witness to the good Jesus did in Judea and Jerusalem (10:39).

Jesus’ life is the focus there. It is not only the importance of good deeds that is emphasized, but Jesus’ intimacy with God. He was anointed by the Holy Spirit and *with power*, and *so* he went about doing good. He was the God-man, “God was with him” in a way unparalleled in history.

Despite all the good he did, the authorities had him killed, but on the third day he arose, appearing only to those who were close to him while he was alive. In Matthew, Luke, and John we read about his appearances to the women and to the apostles. In Acts, here, Peter finishes with the teaching, “Everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name” (10:43).

Faith, then, is saving. Some had that faith because they were “chosen by God” (10:42), they spent time in his presence, heard him preach, and saw his compassionate deeds. They knew him well. Others had faith because they believed the message that was handed on. Both receive “forgiveness of sins through his name.” So the Resurrection is not only Jesus’ own conquest of death, but it communicates the forgiveness of sins that Jesus offered, and it promises a resurrection for each one of us.

What are emphasized in Acts are the Spirit-empowered goodness of Jesus, his amazing vindication by being resurrected, and the salvation that he now offers. Probably some or all of that was mentioned by Mark in his ending that was accidentally lost. How can an accident have an effect on something as important as the Bible? But doesn’t that frequently happen in real life? Terrible accidents rob us of something wonderful; it happens all the time. But—and this is crucial—God still provides us with what we need. We have Matthew, Luke, John, and Acts, to learn about the Resurrection and its after-effect. God always gives us enough to go on. We can rely on that principle.

Without the Resurrection, we would probably not have the church. Without the church, many good things would not have emerged when they did. The first hospitals were care facilities opened up by Christians. Without Christian insight into the value of the individual, we probably would not have the idea of democracy and of the inherent worth of the person.

It is Jesus who said the *one* sheep is as important as the ninety-nine, and the shepherd sets out to save the *one* sheep who wandered. He also uses the image of a woman who loses a coin and lights the house, sweeps the floor, and searches until she finds it, for there is *value* in the one coin (Luke 15:8–10).

There is *value* in the one human being. So much value that God wants us to go on living and growing forever, and promises a resurrection for us. The Resurrection of Jesus is prophetic of the resurrection promised for us. As Jesus did, we will awaken at the end of our life journey. We will be received in the mansions on high that Jesus mentioned. His Resurrection blazes the trail for us. And even in *this* lifetime, our goal is to follow his path of being filled with the Holy Spirit and power.

Ask for spiritual guidance in your life. You can have spiritual power, too. You can be a light to those around you. He is risen! He is risen indeed!