

# Which Way Do We Go?

An Easter Sermon drawn from Mark 16:1-8  
Resurrection Day, 2018 A.D.  
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*“Overcome with terror and dread, they fled from the tomb.  
They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.” Mark 16:8*

Mary, Mary<sup>i</sup>, and Salome were good women. As Jesus was dying on the cross, they stood with his mother, Mary. Why Mary was such a popular name one has to wonder who she was that these women were named to honor. She too must have been a good and faithful woman. The kind of woman who did her duty no matter how hard life's circumstances were.

Mary, Mary, and Salome knew what their duty was for Jesus. They needed to care for his body. They needed to anoint it with spices. They needed to do the work of these three days in part to monitor that he was truly dead. Given what Jesus went through to die, the beating of 39 lashes followed by being hammered to the cross, he had to be dead. Add to that the reality that he was laid in the tomb on Friday night just before sunset and the beginning of Jewish Sabbath and that they were able to go to him only after sunrise on Sunday, there was no way he could have survived his injuries with no one caring for him.



History has had other women who paralleled Mary, Mary, and Salome. One was Coretta Scott King, a pastor's wife who had to bury her assassinated husband fifty years ago this coming week. You may watch one of many television programs made to help us remember and reflect on Martin Luther King, Jr.'s life and assassination. But as an Easter people, please watch Mrs. King as well. When her pastor husband died, Coretta King was a full-time stay at home mom whose primary work was raising their four children while doing her ordinary hospitality duty as the "First Lady" of a black Baptist church in Atlanta, Georgia. Her work at home made his work possible in the nation.

When her husband died from a single gunshot, instantly Mrs. King had a difficult duty to do. She had to lead his followers in mourning his death. As an eleven-year-old child, my biggest memory of that week was our principal, Harry Post, gathering the fourth, fifth, and sixth graders of our school in the library to watch the funeral being live broadcast on the school's single black and white television using only "rabbit ears" to catch the signal. The one thing I remember best of watching that broadcast was the shock of hearing Dr. King's voice as the camera was trained on Mrs. King and her youngest daughter.

This past week fifty years later, I checked my memory against YouTube watching as a historian/preacher rather than as a stunned child. Two things amazed me. First, I was amazed at the accuracy of my childhood memory—I had no real need for YouTube. This experience leads me to believe more firmly in the accuracy of Mark's gospel, our oldest. Second, was the things my trained eyes saw which my childhood eyes could not see. In that filmed moment of memory, Mrs. King was dressed exactly the same as Jacqueline Kennedy had dressed for her husband's funeral. And while Bernice King was not wearing the exact same outfit as Carolyn Kennedy, like Carolyn Bernice was wearing her Sunday best. Going on to watch the funeral procession, Mrs. King put her husband's coffined body on a share cropper's wagon pulled by two mulls; a strong parallel to Mrs. Kennedy putting her husband's coffined body on a horse drawn caisson.

Thrust out of her home and into leadership by her husband's death, Mrs. King did her duty just as Mary, Mary, and Salome were doing their duty for Jesus. Like generations of Christian women between them, these women did their duty in the face of a horrific, sudden death for a man they very much loved. A man they followed.

However, Mary, Mary, and Salome faced a unique problem that no dutiful woman before them and no dutiful woman since has faced as they came to where they thought Jesus' body lay. Jesus' tomb was a hand cut cave in a hillside garden owned by Joseph of Arimathea. He had designed it for the burial practices of the day, which called for allowing the bodies' flesh to decompose naturally before gathering the remaining bones together in a small box called an ossuary. Late on Friday afternoon, Jesus' body had been quickly laid on the tomb's

bed and covered with linen. All perfectly ordinary and not a problem for the women. However, a huge stone was rolled in front of the opening by Herod's order and a Roman guard was posted all to keep Jesus' followers from taking his body and proclaiming his resurrection. How would Mary, Mary, and Salome be able to do their duty?

Anyone who has buried a loved one understands their shock at arriving at the tomb to find it open! Adrenalin flooded their own bodies. Fear grabbed their hearts as they wondered what the enemies of Jesus did with his body. Spices dropped by shaking hands, they went to the open tomb. Did they think they may have been putting their own lives at risk? Or were they so overwhelmed that they were only checking on duty driven autopilot to see if he was still there and if they could do what duty demanded?

How shocked would you be looking into a tomb where you had left a body but saw a white robed man sitting across from the body's empty bed? Speechless, Mary, Mary and Salome heard the man say, "Don't be alarmed! You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised. He isn't here. Look, here's the place where they laid him. Go, tell his disciples, especially Peter, that he is going ahead of you into Galilee. You will see him there, just as he told you." (Mark 16:6,7 Common English Bible.)

Other gospel writers make the women's response so beautiful. In Matthew's gospel, Jesus suddenly appeared to all three (Mt. 28: 9). In Luke's the three went straight to the apostles to share what they just experienced (Lk. 24:9). In John's Mary Magdalene heard Christ speak to her alone in the garden (Jn. 20: 11-18).

Only Mark wrote, "Overcome with terror and dread, they fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid" (Mk. 16:8, CEB).

One theologian at United Methodist Discipleship Ministries commented:

"In Mark, the women who come are sent to tell others by the dazzlingly bright young man they meet there. But at least at first, they are too awestruck to speak. We know that eventually they did speak (else we wouldn't be here!). But the oldest and most reliable manuscripts of Mark's gospel conclude with their awe at what they have seen and heard. It is an open invitation for us to do the same in worship today -- to abide for a while in the sheer awe of this news.

"Which way will those (of us gathered) today most need to go? Do (we) need to move toward hearing Christ calling (us) by name and sending (us) to tell others? Or might (we) need simply to abide for a time in the wonder of it all . . .?"<sup>ii</sup>

What kind of Christians will we be? What response will we make as we hear the story again? What is our duty? Over the almost 2000 years<sup>iii</sup> since Mary, Mary, and Salome came to Christ's open tomb, we who hear their story have made numerous responses.

Some have and do doubt Mary, Mary, and Salome's testimony. It is just too spectacular for some to believe. This doubting has gone on from the very day Christ rose (Jn. 20:19-29). Perhaps you have been or are even now among those who doubt. Mary, Mary, and Salome were afraid of people who doubted. So afraid of what could be done to them, that at first, they told no one (Mk. 16:8).

Some heard their story and still wonder. Is this you? Are you among those who still need to wonder at it all? Perhaps today is the day when the risen Christ will come to you.

Which leaves the rest of us, we who believe and who have heard Christ call us by name. We need to do what Mary, Mary, and Salome ultimately did—we need to share the Good News that Christ the Lord is risen today! How will we go about doing that great duty?

Amen.

Dear Sermon Reader,

In worship we stood immediately and sang, “Christ the Lord Is Risen Today” by Charles Wesley. Here are those lyrics for you to use as you will in pondering how you now do your duty.

Grace always, Rev. Dawn

Christ the Lord is risen today, Alleluia!  
Earth and heaven in chorus say, Alleluia!  
Raise your joys and triumphs high, Alleluia!  
Sing, ye heavens, and earth reply, Alleluia!

Love's redeeming work is done, Alleluia!  
Fought the fight, the battle won, Alleluia!  
Death in vain forbids him rise, Alleluia!  
Christ has opened paradise, Alleluia!

Lives again our glorious King, Alleluia!  
Where, O death, is now thy sting? Alleluia!  
Once he died our souls to save, Alleluia!  
Where's thy victory, boasting grave?  
Alleluia!

Soar we now where Christ has led, Alleluia!  
Following our exalted Head, Alleluia!  
Made like him, like him we rise, Alleluia!  
Ours the cross, the grave, the skies, Alleluia!

Hail the Lord of earth and heaven, Alleluia!  
Praise to thee by both be given, Alleluia!  
Thee we greet triumphant now, Alleluia!  
Hail the Resurrection, thou, Alleluia!

King of glory, soul of bliss, Alleluia!  
Everlasting life is this, Alleluia!  
Thee to know, thy power to prove, Alleluia!  
Thus to sing, and thus to love, Alleluia!<sup>iv</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> We are not certain which “Mary, the mother of James” this could have been. Since Mark does not identify her as Jesus’ mother and tradition holds that Salome was the mother of the apostle John who had a brother James, I am assuming that she was mother of James the son of Alphaeus, also known as James the Minor, an apostle who is not identified as being John’s brother. See Mark 3:16-18.

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship/lectionary-calendar/easter-day> Accessed on 3/22/2018.

<sup>iii</sup> Using reliable historical markers in the four Gospels, the Julian calendar, and the first full moons after the spring equinox marking the beginning of Passover, many New Testament scholars believe the most likely date of Jesus’ crucifixion by our calendar was April 7, 30 A.D. in the Gregorian calendar we now use.

<sup>iv</sup> #302 United Methodist Hymnal, 1989