A Message of Mercy

Mark 16 begins with the story of three women who arose very early on Easter Sunday morning.

- These faithful three had determined in their hearts to press through their grief
  - and push beyond their fear
  - and go to the grave of Jesus to treat His body to a proper embalming.
- As they picked their way down the deserted alleyways and back roads of Jerusalem,
  - fear and sorrow were their constant companions.
- All who knew Him,
  - all who walked with Him,
    - all who trusted and hoped in Him were now frightened for their lives.
- No doubt they were still in shock,
  - no doubt the reality of what had transpired had not yet fully broken in upon them.
- It is likely that they were still struggling to assimilate
  - everything that had transpired in this brutal, unforgettable week.

It had begun in such a festive manner.

- Passover was a special holiday.
  - It was a time of celebration and remembrance,
  - a time to rejoice over the many blessings of God.
- But this Passover was different.
  - There was such an excitement in the air,
  - almost an electric buzz among the crowds.
- Because, for the first time ever,
  - it was beginning to dawn on all the people of Jewry that the Messiah had come,
  - that he was walking among them!
- What an incredible day it was when he came riding into Jerusalem on the back of a colt.
  - The crowds had thronged the streets.
- In a public display that was reminiscent of the triumphant entry of Kings into the city they celebrated Him.
  - In their excitement they had waved palm branches and cried,
  - “Hosanna, blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!”

There was so much excitement,

- so much laughter
  - and shouts of joy.
- For so long they had waited
and anticipated the day when the Messiah would come

and now here he was,
  • the King of all Kings,
  • Lord of all Lords,
  • riding the colt of a donkey down the streets of Jerusalem.

They were ready to crown him King of the Jews.

They were ready to rally around him,
  • lift him upon their shoulders
  • and cast off the cruel bondage of Rome.

He had been their healer,

he had been their teacher,

but now they saw him as their deliverer!

He had come, and He would set them free.

It is amazing how drastically things can change in just a few short moments of time.

With the passing of just days, that same multitude would lift their voice to curse Him.

That same triumphant crowd would condemn him with their cruel cries for crucifixion.

It is amazing that a week that had begun with such grand expectations could change so dramatically in such a quick manner.

It must have taken them by surprise.

One day they were lifting their voice with the multitude in glad Hosannas,
  • and just a few days later they swept aside by an angry mob
  • until they finally found themselves hidden away in seclusion afraid for their very lives.

And now here they were,

picking their way through the predawn darkness trying to make it unnoticed to a borrowed tomb
  • where they had laid the body of the one in whom all of their hopes had rested.

At that same early hour of the morning,

while Jerusalem slept in a restless slumber,

I can imagine yet another individual who was also awake,
  • and who was also pondering the weekend’s events.

Peter was a broken man.

Sleep wouldn’t come easy for him
  • and his nights, as his days, had been filled with the restless agony of one who, when it mattered most, had failed his Lord.

For him the days and hours, since the crucifixion, had been filled with weeping and lamenting.

His spirit was crushed;

his hopes had been dashed upon the rocks of utter defeat.
• How many times must he have run through the events of the last hours he had spent with Jesus.
  o How many times must he have played through the sequence in his mind,
    ▪ wishing there was some way to change it all.
• But each time he arrived at the same ending,
  o each time his master was slain at the hands of a cruel mob
  o and each time the crushing weight of total failure pushed him further into his own pit of despair.

He remembered how excited he had been when Jesus told him and John to go prepare the Passover meal.
• What an honor it was to be selected for such a special task.
  o He remembered Jesus’ cryptic instructions,
  o look for a man with a water pot,
  o he will lead you to the home of his master.
• When you arrive there, simply ask if the upper room has been prepared for the Passover.
  o It had unfolded just like Jesus said it would!
    ▪ The man, the pot, the room that was already prepared.
• He was so excited, this was the moment they had all been waiting for.
  o Jesus was finally going to reveal himself,
    ▪ the crowd had already welcomed him with the praise and worship that he deserved.
• Peter truly believed that, before this weekend was over, Jesus was going to rally the masses to himself
  o and they were going to cast off the weight of Rome.
• He believed it so much that he had traded one of his finest cloaks for a sword.
  o The time had come!
• Once again, like in glorious days gone by, a kingdom for the Jews would be established
  o and Jesus would be rightfully crowned, King of the Jews!

King of the Jews, Peter must have shuddered when he thought of that phrase,
• what a horrific reminder of how things had really turned out.
• Looking back, now he could see how foolish he had been.
  o How full of pride he had become.
• The tears must have flowed fresh down his cheeks as he remembered the Lord on the night of that last supper.
  o The master had wrapped a towel around his waist and began to wash the feet of his disciples.
    ▪ What a menial task, what a degrading posture.
• Peter had risen in his pride and declared forcefully,
  o “No, Lord! I can’t allow you to wash my feet. You’re the master and I’m the servant.”
• The Lords rebuke had been gentle but firm when he said,
  o “Peter, if I don’t wash your feet then you are not one of mine.”
• What else could he do but surrender?
  o After all, the most important thing in his life was his association with Jesus.
• He WAS one of His,
  o He belonged to Him,
    ▪ and He believed that it would always be that way.
  o And, with that thought, fresh tears flowed.

Even then, on that night of nights, Jesus had tried to warn him of what was coming.
• But he had been so foolish,
  o so full of himself,
    ▪ so certain that he would never fail his Lord.
• Jesus had singled him out and told him,
  o in front of all the others that Satan had desired to sift him as wheat.
• “Simon,” He had said, “I’ve prayed for you in particular that your faith would not fail in the coming trial.”
  o Once again Peter’s pride and his zeal rose up within him,
    ▪ forcefully he had risen before all the other disciples and declared,
    ▪ "Master, I’m ready for anything!
      • I’d go to jail for you.
      o I’d die for you!"
• He could still hear the response echoing through his soul,
  o those words that had haunted him through the sleepless nights and dreadful days that had followed.
• Lovingly and sorrowfully, Jesus had said to him,
  o “Peter, before the rooster crows in the morning you will have denied three times that you even know me.”
• Oh! If only he had known,
  o if only he could have understood,
    ▪ if only he could go back and do it all again.
    • If only…

But it happened so fast.
• The next few hours were a blur in his memory.
  o It all changed so suddenly.
• From the Passover supper they went to the garden,
  o the garden where he slept while Jesus agonized,
  o the garden where his failures began,
  o the garden where they arrested Jesus.
• It was all just a blur,
  o the flash of his sword,
    ▪ the words of Jesus,
• the healing of the man he had struck
  o and, finally, the company of soldiers marching away with Jesus as their prisoner.
• The disciples scattered into the dark night, running for their lives.
  o But not Peter, He and John remained.
• Not necessarily together, each of them was caught up in the moment,
  o but both of them followed the soldiers as they left the garden.

Peter followed at a safe distance.
• He finally found refuge in a courtyard
  o where he could see into the house of the Chief Priest, where Jesus was being questioned.
• In the middle of that courtyard was a fire and several people were sitting around it, trying to keep warm.
  o Peter gravitated to the fire and sat with the small group that was gathered there.
• They, too, were watching what was unfolding in the house before their very eyes
  o and there was an air of tension and underlying anger that shocked Peter.
    ▪ Where had this anger come from?
• These folks had surely been in the crowd just days before and had worshipped Jesus,
  o but now they sat around the fire watching His trial and they condemned him.
• He had healed their sick,
  o he had fed their multitudes,
    ▪ but now here they were speaking vehemently against him.

By this time Peter’s head must have been reeling with the chaotic events of the night
• with the dramatic change in the atmosphere of the city.
• He must have been both frightened and dumbstruck
  o at the degree of anger and hatred that he felt among the crowd
  o that continually grew around that little fire in the courtyard.
• Each new person that joined the growing mob expressed their hopes that Jesus would get what was coming to him!
  o In the middle of that disconcerting turn of events
    ▪ one of the servant girls that was sitting at the fire singled Peter out and said,
      ▪ “Hey! I recognize you. You were with Him!”
• Panic gripped his heart
  o and, almost without even thinking about it,
    ▪ Peter had replied, “Woman, I don’t even know him!”
• A short time later, someone else noticed him and said again, “You are one of them.”
But Peter denied it again,
“No I’m not! I don’t know Him.”

Another hour passed,

- as the word spread that Jesus had been arrested,
  - and the crowd around that little fire grew both in volume and in anger.
- There was no doubt in Peter’s mind that the enemies of Jesus had been busy stirring up this mob against Him.
  - It was indeed a dangerous situation
    - and Peter recognized that, by lingering so close to Jesus he was likely putting his life at risk,
    - but he couldn’t bring himself to leave that place.
- Jesus had been everything to him.
  - He had placed all of his hopes and all of his dreams in Him.
    - His life, His future, everything was wrapped up in Jesus.
- And, as he stood there at that fire contemplating these things he heard yet another voice,
  - now more adamant and forceful,
  - “This man was with Jesus! Look at him, he’s from Galilee!”
- As the condemning crowd turned towards Peter and fear swelled up in his heart
  - he adamantly responded with a curse and the words he would never forget,
    - “I don’t know what you are talking about. I don’t know him!”

At that very moment, Luke tells us that two things happened.

- The words were hardly out of his mouth when a rooster crowed at the coming dawn.
  - And, in that same instant,
    - Jesus turned from within the house and looked into the courtyard,
      - looked straight into Peter’s eyes!
- And he knew. Right then he knew.
- The words of Jesus came flooding over him,
  - “Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.”
- Turning from the fire and the angry mob,
  - he ran into the fading darkness of the night,
    - where tears and failure and defeat overwhelmed him.
- He wept bitterly as he realized that he had so dramatically failed
  - on this, the most important night of his life!
- Peter was, indeed a broken man.
  - And, as he peered through a crack in the shutters to see the light of a Sabbath day dawning
    - his heart trembled within him.
• Everything had changed.
  o His future was lost in that rash moment of denial.
• Peter had once possessed so much vigor,
  o so much strength,
    ▪ so much zeal,
    • but now he was a broken regretful man.
• In his mind he was convinced that things would never be the same again,
  o but what he didn’t know was that, on that morning,
    ▪ everything would change yet again!

By this time night was beginning to turn to day
• and the three women were approaching the tomb
  o where they had laid the bloody and beaten body of Jesus.
• As they drew near they were consumed with a new worry.
  o Who would roll back the stone for them?
    ▪ How would they get into the tomb?
• Mark tells us that, as they discussed it among themselves,
  o one of them looked up and realized that the stone had already been rolled away.
• **The moments that followed would forever be etched in their memory.**
  o They rushed into the tomb,
    ▪ hoping that His body would still be there.
• Instead they found an empty tomb,
  o discarded grave clothes
    ▪ and what at first appeared to be a young man sitting to the side, dressed all in pure white.
• In an instant sorrow gave way to excitement
  o and excitement gave way to fear.
    ▪ They were completely taken aback and astonished!

Then the man opened his mouth
• and with a voice that was calm and full of peace he spoke to them.
• His words are recorded in Mark 16:6-7 and they are our text this morning.
  o He said to them, reading from the ESV,
  o "**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. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee.**"
• The angel told Mary and the others,
  o "Go tell his disciples... And Peter!"
• You see, if they had come back from that tomb with a message to the disciples to go meet Jesus in Galilee
  o then Peter wouldn’t have gone!
• But God knew right where Peter was,
  o He knew exactly what Peter was going through
• and on that blessed resurrection morning he sent a *message of mercy* to Peter.

• He singled him out,
  o the one, among the remaining eleven, who thought he had forever failed him!
  o The one among the remaining eleven who would never count himself worthy,
    ▪ the one who thought he had gone too far,
    ▪ the one who that he had done too much,
    ▪ the one who thought that he could never get back to where he once had been with God.

• God sent a message to all of his disciples that morning
  o but he sent a special message,
    ▪ a specific message to Peter.

Those two words, “And Peter”, would define the remainder of Peter’s life.

• Those two words would speak volumes to his soul.
  o I can just imagine him,
    ▪ with wild eyes
  o as he looks into the face of a breathless Mary
    ▪ with utter astonishment and exclaims,
    o “Tell me again, exactly what did the angel say?”

• I can hear her adamant reply,
  o “Oh Peter! He said go tell His disciples... And Peter!”

• Tears flowed again,
  o but this time they were a different kind of tears.

• What Peter received on that Easter Sunday morning was a Message of Mercy.
  o It was God speaking directly to him and saying that,
    ▪ in spite of your failures,
    ▪ in spite of your broken commitments,
    ▪ in spite of your shortcomings
    • – I still love you
      o and I still have a place for you among my disciples.

Two thousand years ago, on Easter Sunday morning,

• there was a very specific message of mercy
  o that was dispatched from the throne room of heaven
  o to single broken and defeated child of God
    ▪ who no longer counted himself worthy to be numbered among the chosen few.

• And I feel very strongly today,
  o that God wants this Easter Sunday morning to be characterized by that same Message of Mercy.
So I come to this pulpit with a message for all of the followers of God but specifically for you!
  - I come to tell all that there is hope and life and purpose to be found at the door of an empty tomb.
    - But I come specifically to tell you!
- This is a personal message from heaven.
  - You know who you are.
    - You know what you’ve been through.
    - You remember how your faith got shipwrecked.
    - You remember how you lost your way.
  - And I know today that if I make a call for the faithful,
    - you won’t consider yourself in that number.
- I know that if I tell the disciples that Jesus will meet them at an altar today
  - that you won’t count yourself among that number.
- But I’ve come with a mandate from heaven
  - to issue an invitation to you!
    - This message is for You!

There’s mercy in this house this morning!
- It’s the gospel of a second chance!
  - God isn’t finished with your life.
    - You may have given up on yourself,
    - but God hasn’t given up on you.
- He remembers where he brought you from
  - and He remembers the plans that he has for your life
    - and He STILL has a purpose for you to fulfill!
- God hasn’t given up on you!
  - Easter is about an empty tomb and a risen savior,
    - it’s about victory over death, hell and the grave.
- But I’ve got a feeling this morning that, if you could talk to Peter,
  - he would tell you that Easter is all about second chances!
    - Easter is all about healing and restoration!
      - Easter centers around a message of mercy!

The message that the angel sent to the disciples and Peter was that Jesus would meet them in Galilee.
- Galilee is where it all started for them.
- It was in Galilee that Jesus first looked at Peter and said,
  - “Come, follow me and I will make you fishers of men.”
- It was an invitation to go back to the beginning,
  - to go back to where it all started.
    - To go back to the place where Peter first turned his life over to Jesus.
- In that place, where it all began,
  - there Peter would find forgiveness and a fresh start.
• This morning, if you’ve ever failed God,
  o I’ve got a message for you.
• God told me to tell the whole church,
  o but especially you that he wants to meet you where it all started.
• He wants to take you back to the altar,
  o back to the place where you first turned your life over to Him.
• It’s a message of mercy,
  o it’s the gospel of a second chance!
• He will meet you in that place where you first met him.
  o There’s forgiveness there,
    ▪ there’s a fresh start there,
    • there’s healing and hope there.
• And the invitation is for all but it is especially for you!

CLOSE
The question this morning is what will you do with the invitation?
• Peter... He went to Galilee,
  o and finding nothing better to do,
  o he gathered some of the disciples together
    ▪ into a boat crew and they went fishing.
• It was one of those dreadful nights where they toiled all night long but caught nothing.
  o The rising sun found them on their way back to shore with an empty boat when a man called out to them from the shore,
    ▪ “Did you catch anything?”
• The disciples answered,
  o “No. It was a bad night for fishing.”
• Then came the reply,
  o “Cast your nets on the other side and see what happens.”
• It must have seemed eerily familiar
  o but somehow they were too weary to catch on.
• Grumbling they decided to cast the nets one more time, on the other side of the boat.
  o And, all of a sudden, the nests were full,
  o there were so many fish that they couldn’t pull them all in.
• John realized it first and, turning to Peter, he said,
  o “It’s Jesus! He’s here, just like He said He would be!”

What happened next must have surprised everyone.
• When Peter realized that it was Jesus,
  o he dove into the sea and began to swim to the shore!
• John must have said,
  o “What are you doing Peter?”
  o “You’re making a mess of yourself Peter!”
  o “Peter, the boat is headed for shore...”
• But the boat wasn’t fast enough for Peter!
  o Peter was silently crying out, “If you only knew...
    ▪ When I had failed,
    ▪ when I wasn’t worthy,
    ▪ when I was at my lowest,
      • He offered me a second chance!
• You can ride the boat to shore if you want to
  o but the boat isn’t fast enough for me!
    ▪ I’m not gonna miss this.
      • Jesus is here FOR ME!
        o He came to Galilee to meet ME!
• I know he came for the rest of you,
  o I know the message went to all of the disciples…”
• **But, as Peter swam for shore the only thought on his mind must have been,**
  o *“He is here just for me!”*

I’ve come to tell you this morning that Jesus is here.
• The real question is what will you do?
• Let me tell you what Peter would do if he was in your place.
  o He would abandon ship!
  o He would jump overboard.
  o He wouldn’t wait for an altar call.
  o He wouldn’t care what anyone else might think.
• He would have one thought on his mind,
  o Jesus came to this place to give me another chance –
    ▪ And I’m not going to let this opportunity pass me by!
• If I may be so bold, there are some in this place this morning
  o that need to forget for just a moment that it’s Easter Sunday,
• there are some that need to forget about everyone else that is here,
  o and you need to realize that heaven has sent you a specific message of
    mercy in this house this morning!
• God is calling you back into a relationship with Him!
  o God is calling you, in spite of everything else in your life,
  o He is speaking directly to you,
    o and He’s offering you another chance at Mercy!
• Don’t let this moment pass you by...