

Mark 16:1-8 *When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. <sup>2</sup>And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. <sup>3</sup>And they were saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?" <sup>4</sup>And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back—it was very large. <sup>5</sup>And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. <sup>6</sup>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. <sup>7</sup>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." <sup>8</sup>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.*

## Crucifixion – Easter, Mark 16:1-8

Hope may seem like an obviously good thing. A quality that goes unquestioned and is almost always positive to have built into a society. Never give up hope. We should always hope towards the future, hope that this pain will pass, that a better day is over the horizon. The sun will come out tomorrow. But hope is not such an obviously positive thing. In fact throughout history it has garnered some mixed reviews. Thucydides in his history of the Peloponnesian war says that those who hope, "typically have a poor understanding of their situation, fail to come up with good plans, and things go badly for them in war." Likewise Plato writes that the divine beings have given us, ""those mindless advisers confidence and fear, (...) and gullible hope." Seneca, who is having a bit of a moment lately, equates fear and hope,

*Fear keeps pace with hope. Nor does their so moving together surprise me; both belong to a mind in suspense, to a mind in a state of anxiety through looking into the future. Both are mainly due to projecting our thoughts far ahead of us instead of adapting ourselves to the present. (Seneca, Letter 5.7-8; in: 1969: 38)*

Seneca here is putting his finger on the key danger of hope. If you have hope, that means by definition you are risking your happiness on some future which you can neither know nor control. This type of risk is simply foolishness to the stoic. I think even in today's age when we encounter someone that is genuinely hopeful, they often appear simply naïve. If you're hopeful it is just because you are not paying close enough attention. Hope is a luxury experience of the privileged class, but if you had any empathy at all, you'd be a cynic. I mean John Oliver is a cynic and he knows everything.

One of the key ways in which Christianity has always been out of step, is with this insane, apparently naïve, obsession with hope. Today we celebrate the reason for this obsession with hope. Today we see hope break into the world, at a point which seemed genuinely hopeless and would reframe hope forever. The resurrection means that our hope is certain, an anchor of the soul. We are called to a position that has always been outside the norm, the position of hope. This morning we will see in the text the problem of hope, source of our hope, the aim of our hope.

## 1. The Problem of Hope

*Mark 16:1-3 When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. <sup>2</sup>And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. <sup>3</sup>And they were saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?"*

Jesus was crucified on a Friday, buried later that evening by a man named Joseph of Arimathea and the following Sunday, where our text picks up for the day, three women Mary Magdalene, Mary James and Jesus's mother, and a woman named Salome bring spices to anoint Jesus's body. This anointing is not to prevent any decomposition, but simply an act of love and devotion to the deceased person. These women are not at this point operating out of any hope for the future, in fact it is much the opposite. They are mourning a hope that they had and had since been deferred. This is an honoring of their beloved dead, and the hope that went with him.

Mark records only this brief detail of their conversation on the way to the tomb, which was basically wondering who could roll away the stone from the entrance to the tomb so that they might be able to access Jesus's body. The other disciples are hiding and currently terrified, and the women would likely not want to request the help of any of the attendants of the tomb. They in fact don't know what they're walking towards but they keep going.

What we see here as these women walk to pay their last rights, is an encounter with the ultimate finality of every human hope, death. While many have tried to right off death as simply a part of life, it seems to be the wisest among us that confront it head on. Death necessarily removes hope, it brings a total finality to any imagination that things might improve or even continue. We may recoil into the present, and avoid the existence of death, as Seneca would instruct us to do, but isn't that just as naïve as hope? To simply avoid the one absolute certainty?

As we walk we deal with this certain truth, we cannot roll back the stone which covers the tomb. We are stuck without a real answer. We can Foolishly and deceitfully hope for a life that avoids the certainty of death, or ignore death's certainty and naively engage with the present? And if we must be honest with ourselves, then we will despair. The Bible minces no words, death is not a natural part of life, it is the consequence of our sin, and rebellion against God. We cannot have hope without addressing death, and we cannot address death without addressing our sin.

## 2. The Source of our Hope

*Mark 16:4-8 And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back—it was very large. <sup>5</sup>And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. <sup>6</sup>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. <sup>7</sup>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.”*

As the women approach the tomb however, the problem they thought they were walking towards had already been addressed. The stone had been rolled back. They enter the tomb and see an angel, who tells them the unthinkable, that Jesus's death which they witnessed, did not have the final word. The angel tells the women that Jesus is risen, he isn't in the tomb anymore because he is making his way to Galilee just as he had told them that he would. In Christ God has done the unthinkable, he has conquered death, and Jesus is risen to life never to die again.

The resurrection means that our greatest enemy has been defeated, because death no longer has the final word, but we have a hope of eternal life. The Angel calls them to see the critical facts of what they are encountering. The very Jesus whom they witnessed as crucified, that very Jesus who most certainly did die, God has raised from the dead. Not as a ghost or some vision, but that very person, for they can see where his body was and is no longer. This is the source of our hope.

The Angel makes it clear that the Jesus they are looking for is the Jesus who was crucified. That means Jesus really did die. In Jesus's death we see that the penalty for our sin, which is death, must be paid, and the fact that Jesus truly died means he has paid it. Now in Jesus's resurrection, we see that the sin which holds us down in death, has no hold on Jesus. He is raised and just as he has taken on the punishment that we deserved so he offers us the eternal life

that he deserves. We have this incredible hope in the resurrection, because in it we see that death has been defeated, and the wages of our sin has been paid. In Jesus we have an absolutely certain source of hope that our sin which corrupts the world and keeps us from God, has been dealt with and the punishment that we deserve has been paid. We see that death will no longer have the final word and the creation will be made new.

### **3. The Certainty of our Hope**

*Romans 5:1-2 Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>2</sup>Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.*

Christianity shifts the language around hope because our hope is no longer a risk, but a certainty in Christ, because he has been raised from the dead. The Resurrection means, that even the most hopeless situations now have a reason to hope. Even in our death we are free because we no longer stand in condemnation before God, but have been justified by faith in Jesus's resurrection from the dead. Paul in his letter to the Romans continues,

*Romans 5:3 Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, <sup>4</sup>and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, <sup>5</sup>and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.*

You see because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we have a hope that can never put us to shame. A hope that causes you to have an optimism that must only appear naïve. And yet is grounded in the greatest act of love in history, Jesus death on the cross. Because of the resurrection we hope, that his kingdom will come, so we live exclusively for his kingdom. We hope that one day every tear will be wiped away, and death will be no more. We hope that God will forgive us and restore us to right relationship with him. We place our hope in things that outside of the resurrection would certainly put us to shame, but because of Christ, it is right to hope.