

# SURPRISED AND SCARED

SERIES: BRIDGES & BARRIERS



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Mark 16:1-8  
Final Message  
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*Mark 16:1-8*

He is risen! He is risen! He is risen!

It's so good to be with you here this morning to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This day commemorates the single most important event in all of history. If you don't know why I hope you'll find out by the end of our service.

My wife and I recently returned from a trip to Israel with a group from our church. At one point during our trip I learned how differently my wife and I respond to situations. I think every couple has a romantic partner and a practical partner.

Our group had travelled into Jordan for a few days and were crossing back into Israel. At the border, there was a security checkpoint similar to what you'd find in an airport. Half of us were through security when guards started yelling at us to move toward the ends of the building, away from the security station. As we ran away, people carrying machine guns ran past us to deal with whatever situation was going on. It turned out to be nothing, but my wife and I had completely different reactions to the incident.

I was convinced it was a false alarm from the beginning. But my wife is always on alert. She told me her first instinct was to get as far away from me as possible. If something terrible was about to happen, maybe one of us could survive for the sake of our kids.

If you hadn't guessed, I'm the romantic. If I thought something terrible would happen, I'd want to die holding hands. Or I'd cover her body with mine in a desperate act of love. Not my wife. She's thinking practically. One of us has to survive to take care of our five children.

What about you? How do you respond in a tragedy? If something terrible happens, what do you do?

This morning we're going to look at the biblical account of Jesus Christ rising from the dead through the eyes of three women. As the story begins, each of

the women is facing a tragedy. They've gone through an emotional weekend of disappointment, grief, and loss.

We're going to walk with them to the tomb of Jesus. What were they feeling? What did they expect to find?

What they discovered was a surprise to them. At first, the women didn't react in celebration or joy or even happiness. Their first instinct was fear. These three women encountered the message of Easter, and they were surprised and scared.

I'm hoping that in the few minutes that we have that we'll get to know them well enough so that we can share their surprise. And maybe their fear will help us to understand our own.

You know how this story of Easter goes. You know the unexpected ending. But you don't know how God might stir in you this morning as you hear it told. I'm praying that you'll be surprised by what this story means for you today. Maybe you'll believe it for the first time. Maybe you'll grow in your belief. Maybe you'll have new questions. Or new answers.

## The Three Women

We first meet these three women at the beginning of Mark 16.

### Mark 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.**

Three women walk to the tomb early on Easter morning. Let's get to know them.

We know the most about Mary Magdalene. While our group were in Israel, we visited the city of Magdala, a site that was recently excavated in 2009. As they uncovered this ancient city, buried since 68 A.D., they discovered something curious. Near the city center were

four Jewish *mikvaot*. Those are ritual baths Jews would use for religious cleansing.

None of the other cities discovered in the area had *mikvaot* because they were all near the Sea of Galilee. Everyone washed in the freshwater sea to become pure. Why did Magdala have four? Why build ritual baths a few hundred yards from the sea?

Because Magdala could afford it. The city had enough money to save them the inconvenience of walking down to the sea. Does that sound familiar? Why do we have incredible food and world-class recreational opportunities and top-notch educational institutions? Because we can afford them.

To say "Mary of Magdala" would be like saying "Mary of Atherton." She came from wealth and privilege, which is probably why Luke tells us that she helped to fund the ministry of Jesus. (Luke 8:1-3)

We also know that Mary was healed of seven demons. She was part of an affluent community, but she didn't belong. Mary lived on the outskirts. She was single. Lonely. She was excluded from regular life. She may have felt like an imposter.

Maybe some of you feel that way. You're living in Silicon Valley, and everyone else fits. They belong. But you are different. You have pain that others don't know about. You feel like people might find out what's really true of you. You never measure up. You never accomplish enough. You never really belong.

Mary of Magdala had hidden pain. Do you have hidden pain amidst the success of Silicon Valley?

Mary, the mother of James, was very different. Her son wasn't the James that gets all the attention. He wasn't the James that would eventually lead the Jerusalem church and write a book of the Bible. Her son became known as James the Lesser.

He was the lesser because there was a better James. A louder James. A more confident James. A more influential and dynamic and successful James.

This Mary, the mother of James, is an invisible character. We don't know much about her at all, just like her son. She was unknown, overshadowed, and under-appreciated.

This Mary had a hidden heart because everyone else overshadowed her. Do you feel like that? Are you

overshadowed and outdone by everyone around you? Are you unseen because everyone else draws all the attention? Is your heart hidden?

Alongside these two Marys was a strong woman. She was the mother of the other James. Not James the lesser, but the real James. Her two boys, James and John, were known as the sons of thunder. They were boisterous and assertive and impulsive and influential.

Ironically, her name, Salome comes from the Hebrew root word for peace. This woman named Peace was the mother of thunder. She had rowdy boys.

I know some women who have rowdy sons. My sister has four sons who grew up in rural Ecuador where she served as a medical missionary. They call themselves the jungle boys. There's a look in the eyes of women with sons like that. They try to stay on top of the craziness. They try to stay ahead of the chaos.

Salome took that to a whole new level. She was the one who pulled Jesus aside and asked him if her sons could be Number Two and Number Three when he became king. She was the type of person to control the situation, to manipulate her environment to make sure she stayed on top. Salome was a woman with a hidden agenda.

Some of us aren't that different. We live in a fast-paced, competitive, achievement-oriented environment. It takes constant diligence to stay ahead of the curve. We have to be three steps ahead. Without an agenda, we'd be buried and forgotten. Do you have a hidden agenda?

Who do you relate to? What is your story?

Mary of Magdala? Mary, the mother of the Lesser? Salome, the mother of thunder?

And then there's us. Some of us have hidden pain. Some have hidden hearts. Some have hidden agendas. But each of us has a story that we came in here with. No two are the same. What's your story? Who are you? The real you. The hidden parts of you.

## Facing an Obstacle

These women had suffered a tragedy. They were going to the tomb to find closure and honor this man, Jesus. But they faced an obstacle; something literally stood in their way.

### Mark 16:2-3:

**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?"**

And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. And they were saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?"

The women didn't know what they would do about the stone, but they went to the tomb anyway. After all, each of them had encountered Jesus. He had touched the hidden parts of their lives. Something in them had been changed.

But they didn't expect much going to the tomb that morning. The only thing on their mind was the simple problem of a rock in the way of their final goodbye.

You're here this morning: in church on a Sunday morning. That's not true of most people in our area. I was talking to a woman in my neighborhood a few years ago. When she asked me what I did for a living, I told her I was a pastor. Before she could catch herself, she let it slip, "Do people still do that?"

Some of you have deep faith in Jesus. Some of you have a lot of questions. Some of you are only here to check off a box or please your relatives. But all of you are here.

And all of you have obstacles in your life like a rock that gets in your way. What stands in your way?

We all have something on our minds this morning. All weekend I've been dwelling on a particular conversation I had this week. For you maybe it's finances. Or a job situation. Maybe it's a problem with your children or spouse. Or anxiety that you can't put your finger on. Or a relationship you wish were different. Even as you're sitting here listening, those obstacles are close to the surface in your mind. What will you do about them?

Like the women in our story, we arrive at the tomb preoccupied with the obstacles in our life. What will we find when we get there?

### A Message and A Mission

Mary of Magdala, Mary, the mother of the Lesser, and Salome the mother of thunder didn't find what they expected.

### Mark 16:4-7:

**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."**

The obstacle that these women expected to find had been dealt with. The stone had already been rolled back. But a new situation awaited them. Instead of a body, they found a young man in a white robe. He gives them a surprising message: "He has risen; he is not here."

On the Mount of Olives near Jerusalem, there are over 100,000 graves because that is such a holy site. Maybe being buried there will bring a special benefit. The amazing pyramids of Egypt were fancy crypts for deceased Pharaohs. Today we don't build fancy tombs; we throw our considerable financial and intellectual power at achieving medical immortality.

All throughout history people have been trying to solve the problem of death. These women were worried about the problem of a heavy stone. Little did they know that they would encounter a simple message that a far greater problem had been solved. "He is risen."

What if this were true? What does the resurrection of Jesus mean if it is true?

It means that if you have hidden pain like Mary of Magdala, you can be forever healed. It means that if you have a hidden heart like Mary the mother of the Lesser, you can be fully known by God and accepted. It means that if you have a hidden agenda like Salome, you can rest in the good plans that God has for you.

It means that big problems in our life—death and failure and sin and shame and purposelessness and loneliness—have been dealt with. The death and

resurrection of Jesus mean that if you believe, you are forgiven and free.

What about you? What does this message mean to you?

I don't know what little obstacles you came in here with this morning. Believing in Jesus might not make them go away. But the resurrection of Jesus means that the rift between you and God has been healed. I can't say that following Jesus has been the easiest path my life could have taken. But I can say that it is the best.

Hidden and broken, these three women at the tomb are given the greatest news in the world. And then they are given a mission. This young man in white tells them to go and share this news. What must they have been feeling?

## The Story That Doesn't End

We don't have to imagine for long. The last verse of our passage tells us what they felt.

### Mark 16:8:

**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.**

That's it. With those words, the entire Gospel of Mark comes to a close. Most of your Bibles have more verses included with a footnote that those verses weren't found in the earliest manuscripts. They were probably added by later editors who couldn't imagine ending the story with such a disappointment: "They fled from the tomb and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid."

I think it's a brilliant ending because it's so real and true and believable. So much of my story is just as disappointing. These women had encountered life-shattering news. Of course, they were afraid. Of course, they ran away in terror.

We can't imagine what life would be like if the biggest problem of all were solved. We think we just want our little obstacles to be solved. The idea that the big problem is solved is simply too much. We can't imagine what life

would be like if God took away that problem deep in our hearts that we can't even describe?

What are we afraid of? What were these women afraid of?

Whatever these women were afraid of, they got over it. We know their story doesn't really end here. If it had, we wouldn't be gathered two thousand years later reading about them. Eventually, they believed. Mary of Magdala found life. Mary, the mother of the Lesser, found intimacy. Salome, the mother of thunder, found real purpose.

What about us? Will we get over our fear? What's next for us? What's next in your story?

What is the little obstacle that seems to be in your way: the rock that you don't know how to move? And what is the bigger problem that you don't even dare to dream of a fix for?

What if the resurrection of Jesus addresses that issue for you? What would you find if you received this message in your own life?

I can tell you that following Jesus does not take away all your little problems. But it transforms your perspective. I've gone through some hard situations, but God has been with me. This community has been with me. That makes all the difference in the world. I have hope.

If you don't consider yourself to be a follower of Jesus, consider what following him might mean for you. If you'd like someone to pray with you, either to talk about following Jesus or to share something hard in your life, we have a team of people ready to pray with you after this service.

No matter who you are or what your issues are, you are welcome here. And the message of the Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, is good news for you. You may be surprised and scared, but that does not have to be the end of the story. You, too, can find life from the dead.

He is risen! He is risen! He is risen!