

GO, PROCLAIM, BAPTIZE - FAITH IN ACTION!
St. Mark the Evangelist Sunday (22 April Anno Domini 2012)
Rev. Steven D. Spencer – Pastor Messiah Lutheran Church

Mark 16:14–20

Grace, peace and mercy from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen!

I. THE WOMEN AND THE GOOD NEWS

Just a couple of weeks ago, on Easter morning, we heard about how the women went to the tomb of Jesus to prepare His body for burial. They were greeted there by two angels who shared the incredible news, **“He is not here, He has risen as He said, go and tell His disciples that Jesus is going to Galilee and there they will see Him again!”** The women were filled with joy and went to tell the disciples the good news. But before they could even leave the area they were greeted by the Lord. Armed with the message of the angels and the proof of Jesus resurrection they went and told the disciples the Good News, JESUS IS ALIVE, GO TO GALILEE. Did the disciples believe them?

Last week we found out that the disciples indeed did not believe the news of Jesus resurrection when proclaimed from the lips of the women. St. John in his Gospel account tells us that the disciples were in a room behind locked doors for fear of the Jews. St. John would know about what to expect from the Jewish leaders.

II. INSPIRATION AND THE PERSPECTIVE OF JOHN

I think it's important to realize that each Gospel account offers a different perspective on those evening's events. Each writer pens by inspiration of the Holy Spirit but their words and how our Lord works and lives among is different. John was able to move freely around the Temple and the residences there. It shows that he was very likely related to a Pharisee, a Scribe or even the Chief Priest. Maybe he was one of them at one time. John knows what the Jewish leadership is capable of doing. He shows that the disciples, including himself, were full of fear and doubt. So what John captures for us in his Gospel is how Jesus as God and Savior is capable of coming into a locked room to give peace and the forgiveness of sin that we all need. And to make sure that forgiveness and that message continues He breaths on them and says: **“Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld.”** And to make sure we don't miss out on this important message of Jesus as the loving and forgiving God John includes the account of Thomas and his great confession.

Thomas wasn't there when Jesus entered the locked room that first time. So Thomas said, **“Unless I see in His hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into His side, I will never believe.”** Remember what happened next? **Eight days later, Jesus disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” Then Jesus said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.” Thomas answered Him, “MY LORD AND MY GOD!”** John tells us that what was written in his gospel was so **that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.**

The picture that John paints for us is a bunch of men hiding in a locked room, fear has become the prison cell in which they live. The sound of each step, each hushed whisper outside the door, would be a potential threat and reason to fear all the more. For these men did not believe Jesus rose from the dead until they saw Jesus with their own eyes. And through Thomas' confession **“My Lord and My God”** the disciples realize the full magnitude of Jesus resurrection and identity.

III. THE PERSPECTIVE OF MARK

Today we celebrate the Festival of St. Mark the Evangelist. And the Scripture lesson tells us a lot about St. Mark. Listen once again to the Gospel reading:

Afterward he appeared to the eleven themselves as they were reclining at table, and He rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who saw Him after He had risen. And He said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: in My name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up serpents with their hands; and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover." So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by accompanying signs.

The picture St. Mark paints is uniquely different and yet similar to St. John Gospel. We don't hear about any locked doors. Instead we find the disciple leisurely reclining at the table. Are they in a hurry to get to Galilee to see Jesus? NO! As a matter of fact what are they doing? Eating and drinking. This picture is very similar to that of the Passover meal. During the Seder Dinner the Jewish people would recount or relive the Life of the Jewish people released from captivity in Egypt. I imagine that is what the disciples were doing around the table, reliving the highlights of their life with Jesus. "Do you remember when Jesus healed Simon the leper in Bethany?" How that man was able to go and be with his family once again. Oh that was good but, "Remember when Jesus healed the 10 men with leprosy and only one of them came back and gave thanks. Do you remember that?" "Do you remember how Jesus quelled the storm while we were in the boat?" He was sleeping we had to wake Him up. "Sure that was great but, I think when Jesus walked on water that was even better." Oh you're right, that was better especially when Peter tried to do the same and sank. That was so funny!

It was to these men that ***Jesus appeared and He rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who saw Him after He had risen.*** Who had they not believed? The women who shared the message, ***He has risen as He said He would and is going ahead of you to Galilee there you will see Him again.***

I want you to notice a couple of important things in our text. Jesus rebukes unbelief like rebuking a demon. So what are the fruits of unbelief and hardness of heart? What are the actions of the disciples at this point? What are they doing? They are sitting around, living in the past and taking no action. Here's the first lesson from St. Mark:

1. If you sow unbelief and hardness of heart you will reap inaction.

If you believe in nothing, you will do nothing. If you strive to get nowhere, congratulations you've already reached your destination. Unbelief reaps nothing, that's not totally true it reaps eternal damnation. We were not created to believe in nothing. So man will fill in the blanks with all sorts of things to believe, god's with a little g. Some will live in the past reminiscing others will find new causes weekly sometimes daily.

2. Until we see Jesus, until He speaks to us we will not believe.

Jesus shows us Himself and speaks to us through His Word and Sacrament. We like the disciples can intellectually recount and relive all sorts of experiences but they will not give us faith. Only the presence of Jesus can do that. Through His Word spoken through faithful believers and preached into our ears and through the very means of grace instituted by God, through baptism, absolution and Holy Communion does Jesus come into our time and space to save. Notice what St. Mark's writes: ***Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe shall be condemned.*** Jesus is present in His Word and in His means of grace.

Today we celebrate the Festival of St. Mark the Evangelist. Jesus tells His disciples and us: **“Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to all of creation. Go, Proclaim, Baptize -Faith in Action!** If we do not tell them, how will they hear? Jesus’ word goes out to call, to save and to forgive sin; that is the fruit of faith in Him (†) the fruit of salvation.

Make no mistake about it; you are a wretched, miserable, willful and repugnant sinner. You have sinned in thought word and deed. And quite often that sin is unbelief, not believing enough to do what you ought. Out of fear you hide in room of your own making, locked up in fear and anxiety, your stomach in knots and your minds running through countless scenarios which you have created. They leave you petrified. And for that reason Jesus came and died on the cross and rose the third day to so that He might come to you this day and declare though His imperfect servant, your pastor, that all your sins are forgiven and my peace I give unto to you, for lo I am with you always, even to the end of the age say our Lord Jesus.

Therefore as a called and ordained servant of the Word and in the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ all your sins are forgiven in the name of the Father and the Son and Holy Spirit, in Jesus name, Amen and Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, Amen

Please rise for the offertory.