

Mark 16:1–8 (CEB)

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they could go and anoint Jesus' dead body. ²Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they came to the tomb. ³They were saying to each other, "Who's going to roll the stone away from the entrance for us?" ⁴When they looked up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away. (And it was a very large stone!) ⁵Going into the tomb, they saw a young man in a white robe seated on the right side; and they were startled. ⁶But he said to them, "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. ⁷Go, tell his disciples, especially Peter, that he is going ahead of you into Galilee. You will see him there, just as he told you." ⁸Overcome with terror and dread, they fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

Colossians 3:1–4 (CEB)

Therefore, if you were raised with Christ, look for the things that are above where Christ is sitting at God's right side. ²Think about the things above and not things on earth. ³You died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ, who is your life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.

It is Easter --- Alleluia!!

In recent weeks, we've visited some of the biblical sites in Israel. There are two places in Jerusalem that mark the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. One is the confusing Church of the Holy Sepulcher, over which six denominations have argued for centuries (sad, but true). In it, you find the rock of Golgotha, Jesus' burial tomb, and more. The church is almost certainly over the place where Jesus was buried and risen. Northward, there is the Garden Tomb, a beautiful garden with an early tomb, rolling stone, and more. It is almost certainly not the place – but it sure feels like it. I tell the pilgrims on our Israel trips to put the two sites together in their minds and hearts and they will have it just about right.

Nearly 2,000 years ago, a group of women walked toward the tomb where Jesus' body had been laid early Friday evening. With the ending of the Sabbath, they carried spices to lay beside the decomposing body. But, as they approached the tomb, they saw that the stone had already been rolled aside. As they entered the tomb, they didn't see a body lying there, but, instead, a young man who spoke to them.

Alarmed. Terrified. Amazed. Afraid. Those are the words that Mark uses to describe the reaction of the women to the empty tomb. I'm sure that Salome and the two Marys would have had trouble putting their frightful surprise into words. Some surprises are clearly occasions for joy, others for sadness. But sometimes, like the women's surprise on that Sunday morning, there is only confusion and anxiety and even fear.

Frankly, at first glance, none of this makes sense to us. We think to ourselves, it's Easter morning! Christ is risen! Alleluia! How could alarm and terror characterize the women's experience? Isn't an angel there to explain to them what has happened?

To understand their fear, there are a few things we need to keep in mind:

- Among first-century Jews, there was no expectation of a suffering, much less crucified, Messiah. The Messiah was to arrive in power and might and wonder and glory to cleanse the temple, expel the pagans, and restore God's kingdom. The fact that Jesus ends up dead on a cross could only mean that he wasn't the

Messiah. Wonderful and beloved rabbi, yes. Prophet, yes. But the Messiah could never meet such an end . . . or so everyone believed.

- And if there was no expectation of a dead Messiah, there couldn't be any expectation of a resurrected Messiah, or for that matter the resurrection of any single person until all were resurrected on the Day of the Lord. The ancients knew what we know; namely, until that day comes, the dead stay dead.
- Thus, when the three women arrive and find the stone rolled away, their only thought would be that someone had beaten them to the tomb, either to take Jesus' body or to desecrate it.

To reiterate, they do not arrive at the tomb hoping to find that Jesus had been resurrected. Instead, they don't know what to make of the empty tomb . . . and then they discover an angel is present.

Raised with Christ

Later, the women found their voice, telling Peter and the whole world of an empty tomb and a visiting angel. They would learn that as Jesus had been raised, in a very real sense, so had they. By virtue of their faith in Jesus, they had participated in both Jesus' death and his resurrection.

Paul expresses this early Christian understanding in his letter to the Colossians, using the imaginative wardrobe metaphor of 3:1-14. Because we have been raised with Christ to new life, he writes, we are to take off our old clothes of anger, slander, wrath, deceit, and the rest. We are to don a new wardrobe of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, forgiveness, and, foremost, love. Off with the old; on with the new.

Yet, this is no mere admonition or hope. Paul writes, "you have stripped off the old self with its practices and have clothed yourselves with the new self" (v. 9) Notice that he

How can we be "raised with Christ"?

Colossians 3:1

Paul's reference to Christians being raised with Christ can be read as soaring, but empty, rhetoric. How can we be resurrected with Jesus when we haven't even died yet? Good question.

But he means exactly what he says. For Paul, it is as real as the chair you are sitting in. But how could something have happened already, if it hasn't happened yet? How could it have happened and yet still be coming?

We have a bit of experience with such a notion. We once spoke of marriages as being consummated. Though the bridal couple might be pronounced husband and wife at 3pm, the marriage wasn't "official" until it had been consummated later by the couple's sexual union. If there was no such union, then there had been no marriage; the couple's subsequent separation wouldn't be a divorce but an annulment, which is the recognition that there never had been a marriage.

Thus, if you asked the couple at their reception immediately after the wedding, "Are you married?" They could legitimately reply "yes" and "not yet." Until the consummation, the couple would be in a kind of "in between" time.

Now, that illustration is a mere shadow of what Paul claims. With the death and resurrection of Jesus, God's kingdom, his new world, has come *already*, but *not* yet. Though the consummation (our own bodily resurrection) lies yet ahead, God's people are *already* part of this new world. What is true of Jesus, is true of us. As N.T. Wright puts it in his commentary on Colossians, "You died with the Messiah, so you don't belong in the old world any more . . . You were raised with the Messiah, so you possess a true life in God's new world."¹

1. from Wright's *Paul for Everyone* commentary

uses the past tense. We are already new selves. Now, we must live as the people into whom God has made us.

This transformation encompasses our whole being. Intellectually, we believe things that we didn't before, about ourselves, this world, about our purpose in life, and so on. Morally, we gain a different sense of right and wrong, of good and evil. Behaviors, thoughts, even TV shows and movies which once seemed harmless, no longer do. Emotionally, we love differently. We lavish less love upon ourselves and pour out our love upon God and one another. We become spiritually open to God, but also to the spiritual needs of others. We see the image of God in those whom we once ignored, or worse, oppressed.¹ Truly, the old has gone, the new has come (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Daily Bible Readings

More on the resurrection

Monday, Matthew 28 Matthew's account of Jesus' resurrection

Tuesday, Luke 24:1-12 Luke's account of the resurrection

Wednesday, Luke 24:13-35 The risen Jesus meets two disciples walking to Emmaus.

Thursday, Luke 24:36-59 Jesus comes to see the disciples, as "flesh and bone."

Friday, John 20 John's account of the resurrection and some later appearances

Saturday, John 21 More accounts of the resurrected Jesus

Scott Engle's Bible Classes

Monday Evening Class

We are studying Paul's letter to the Ephesians.

Meets from 7:00 to 8:15 in Piro Hall

Tuesday Lunchtime Class

We are studying the book of Kings (1&2).

Meets from 11:45 to 1:00 in Piro Hall

About the weekday classes:

Join us whenever you can. Each week's lesson stands on its own. This is very "drop-in." Bring something to eat if you like. Bring a study Bible.

On occasion Scott must cancel class, so if you are coming for the first time, you can check www.scottengle.org to make sure the class is meeting.

Scott's 11:00 Sunday Class in Smith Worship Center

This is a large, lecture-oriented class open to all ages.

No class on Easter

Starting next week: *The Apostles' Creed: what we believe and why it matters*

Video of each week's class is posted here: vimeo.com/groups/scottsbiblestudy

¹I've paraphrased some of this from John Stackhouse's book, *Humble Apologetics*, Oxford press, 2002.