



## What's in Galilee?

**TEXT**  
*Mark 1:14–15; 16:1–8*

May 3, 2015 — Sermon by Rev. Tom Are, Jr.

**O**n weeks like this week, I need Mark's gospel. You see, when the world breaks your heart, it's helpful to know that you are not alone. Mark's congregation, they understand.

We watch Baltimore with one more black man struck down, and now those charged to protect and serve are charged with multiple infractions, including second degree murder. Again, the poorest neighborhoods of our cities erupt in frustration and anger and more than a little foolishness. That's why I say we need Mark's congregation. They can help us.

We watch the earth swallow up thousands in Nepal; and we know that thousands more will die a slower death from disease and lack of health care, lack of even basics of food and water. And as always, the poor will suffer the most.

On weeks like this one, we need to sit with Mark's congregation. They know about life when it is broken.

The congregation that Mark writes to is in trouble. They are a small, fragile congregation engaged in ministry a generation after the life of Jesus. They knew Jesus was the Messiah. They

knew Jesus was raised from the dead; they were betting their lives on it. But they were persecuted. Because of their trust in Jesus, they were threatened. To follow Jesus was not about finding your bliss or your purpose or personal fulfillment. To follow Jesus was to be in a battle: a battle against brokenness; a battle against hatred; a battle against apathy; a battle against evil; and most of all, a battle against fear.

More than anything, fear brings out the worst even in the best of us.

Because of this battle, I imagine they wanted Mark to tell them of the resurrection — tell us of the triumph of Jesus. But Mark ends so abruptly. Folks have always thought so. It's because Mark doesn't tell us how Jesus appeared to his followers. For me to say that, deserves some explanation. Chapter 16 includes stories of Jesus appearing to Mary Magdalene. He appears to the eleven disciples. But Mark didn't write that part. All these stories of appearances were added later. They were added later by faithful followers of Jesus. But Mark stopped at Verse 8.

*They said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.*

I think Mark stops there because he knows that it is the only

way resurrection will make sense to his congregation.

What Mark knows is that the resurrection of Jesus is not all lilies and trumpets. The resurrection of Jesus does not mean the sun shines all the time and that life is now some endless Caribbean vacation. Resurrection means both at the same time that God's victory is real, but resurrection also means we are now in the battle. The resurrection of Jesus Christ throws us into the battle for life, for beauty, for love, for a new day — a promised day.

The resurrection angel leaves us with one instruction: *Jesus is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.*

What's in Galilee? Why Galilee? Couldn't Jesus have appeared to them in Jerusalem? Couldn't he have appeared to them in the garden? Couldn't he have lingered around the tomb now empty? Why is a road trip necessary?

If we read this literally, then we might think the way to find Jesus is to take a trip to the Holy Land. Surely there in the green hills of Galilee, surely there beside the soft lapping waters of the Sea of Galilee, surely there Jesus will meet us

as we sit around a campfire and sing *Pass It On*.

No, that's not it. It's not that there is a favorite coffee shop appointed as a rendezvous place.

Mark says the Jesus story started in Galilee. Chapter 1: *Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the good news of God.*

Galilee was the place where Jesus did his ministry. Galilee is where Jesus taught. Galilee is where Jesus battled evil. Galilee is where Jesus showed mercy. Galilee is where he healed the broken and fed the hungry. Galilee is the place where Jesus engaged the battle to push back the fear that controls us.

To go to Galilee is like saying Jesus will meet you in church. It's not an address. It's a condition. To be in Galilee is to be engaged in ministry. It is to do the things that Jesus would do, to live like Jesus would live.

If I understand the text, the angel says when you live like Jesus lived, when you care for the sick and feed the hungry and when you search for justice, Jesus will find you there. Galilee is the place of ministry.

We need that this week. We have witnessed whole communities crumble from chaos. But we have also seen something else. We have seen rescue workers with little more than trowels and gloves — and sometimes not even that — pull from the earth those who have been entombed by rubble but are alive today.

I know my friend Andrew, a Presbyterian pastor in Baltimore, has been all week in Freddie Gray's neighborhood — listen-

ing and marching and pointing to hope. I know of no one who would be more helpful in Baltimore than Andrew. And if you ask him why he is there, I am sure he will tell you because he knows Jesus is alive.

If I understand the text, this passage proclaims that when life is broken, the church is called to do what Jesus would do; and in those moments, he comes to us. That's Galilee.

I can teach this text, but I have asked my colleague and sister, Cindy Wilcox, to tell her own story of resurrection. She knows the truth of this text. I ask you to listen to her with care, because to tell her story requires more courage than I have ever had to muster. To tell her story is an act of faith and love.

*The sun was setting on Sunday, June 6, 1982, in Washington, DC. I was 25 years old and had been sent by a Kansas City engineering firm to the Washington area to work on a six-week government contract. I was SO excited. It was my first time on a jet, first time in a hotel alone and the first time I rented a car. Two weeks into my stay, I was enjoying the day off with new office friends. That evening, they drove me to my hotel and offered to walk me to my room. I declined. I didn't know that I was being stalked. The detective assigned to my case thought this had been going on for some time, as the stalker knew my habits, and most importantly, he knew I was staying alone.*

*My motel room was on the second floor. A single wrought iron staircase, located in the*

*center of the building, offered the only entry/exit to the second floor bank of rooms. I went up the steps and turned right at the landing to walk toward my room. I heard footsteps behind me, which surprised me. Adrenaline shot through my body. I knew I was trapped.*

*Suddenly, I was choked from behind and brutally attacked by a tall, blonde man. I remember thinking to myself, "This is how I'm supposed to die." I thought someone would hear the ruckus that was created, but no one came to help. Though he overpowered me, I fought back and fought back hard. Injured, he ran away, his ultimate purpose unsuccessful, but he left me severely beaten.*

*Some life experiences change us. I walked through a concrete wall that day, the old me on one side and the new me on the other. Maybe you've had a "wall" experience in your life. If so, you know there's no going back. And it takes a long time to get to know the person you've become. I blamed myself for a long time. But that was 33 years ago.*

*Looking back, three important things contributed to my ultimate recovery: (1) I never stopped going to church. (2) I had unconditional love from family/friends. (3) I was lucky enough to be introduced to an amazing therapist named Marlene. She told me with confidence on our first visit, "Yes, I can help you." What followed was years of therapy. Marlene loved me and cared for me every step of the way. Our work was emotionally draining and expensive, but it*

*was a critical investment in my future. I was bound and determined to learn to love myself, unconditionally, as a child of God. I can't pinpoint the exact moment, but it did happen. And I've been at peace ever since. Resurrection is about a new you coming to life. For me, this was resurrection.*

*This may sound odd. I hate what happened to me, but I'm grateful for the way God took my worst moment and used it to create who I am today, and I love the person I've become. I'm also grateful to be healthy enough to share my story with grace and gratitude. Helping other assault victims has also contributed to my recovery. I've volunteered for MOCSA (Metropolitan Organization to Counter Sexual Assault), an amazing K.C. nonprofit organization, totally focused on caring for victims AND those who love them. And I was invited to a Jackson County Corrections facility to speak to inmates, hoping to make an impact on their hearts and their rehabilitation.*

*As he is today, Tom often preaches on resurrection. I've learned that resurrection comes to us in our worst moments. All of us have broken places. Nobody's exempt. But for me, loving and caring for others, and myself, through the love of God, is my best medicine; that's why I am part of this church. And I just happen to be lucky enough to be part of a staff team, where I can love and care for you as you certainly do for me.<sup>1</sup>*

*I can't explain it to you, but I can testify that in the place of*

*ministry, the place of brokenness is the place that Jesus shows up. And in your worst moment, if you seek it, you can find resurrection.*

If you know that dark night, if you are in the worst place in your own life, then Mark would say trust the gospel, trust the way of Jesus. It won't be easy. And it's a long road. But it is the road to a new day; it is the journey to resurrection. And if you think it is impossible, then talk with Cindy; she knows the truth of this passage.

We all are there sometimes.

But there is something else that convicts me. This passage is not just a word for the moment I am broken. It is marching orders every day because the world in which we live is broken; and my confession is, I don't spend enough time in Galilee. I spend too much time saying nothing to anyone because of fear. I don't spend enough time where life is broken. I don't spend enough time with those who face injustice and those whose lives have crumbled. And I know that's where Jesus is.

It's not a good way to end a sermon, but all I can say to you today is this gospel convicts me.

I have to figure out how to get to Galilee — because the world needs those of us who know Jesus is alive to get to Galilee. It's where I want to be. Maybe you do too.

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<sup>1</sup>Cindy Wilcox is the Director of Connectional Ministry at Village. She was the first person

to join the staff team after I came in 2004. She is extraordinary, and Village is blessed to have her in this community.

**This sermon was delivered at Village Presbyterian Church, 6641 Mission Road, Prairie Village, KS 66208.**

The sermon can be read, heard or seen on the church's Web site: [www.villagepres.org/sermons](http://www.villagepres.org/sermons).