



**VILLAGE
CHURCH**

Presbyterian (USA)

He's Not Here, But I Know Where You Can Find Him

SCRIPTURE:
Mark 16:1-8

April 17, 2022; Easter Sunday – Sermon by Rev. Tom Are, Jr.

Unlike the other gospel writers, in Mark, the risen Christ doesn't appear to anyone. That's unfortunate because it's pretty hard to believe that Jesus is raised if you can't see him. We are left standing on uncertain ground with women who don't know what to do. But that's one thing I love about Mark... his honesty. He tells you if you come to this day with questions and a lack of certainty, you are not alone. It was like that the first Easter, too.

The messenger said, "He is not here. He has gone to Galilee. There you will see him."

That seems odd. If this were me, and God resurrected me, I wouldn't travel to Galilee. I wouldn't even go to Hawaii. I would go home. I would find the people I love. But Jesus doesn't return to his disciples; he goes to Galilee. It's a strange way to use resurrection. But the messenger not only says that Jesus has gone to Galilee; he says we need to as well.

Not literally. Don't book a trip to Nazareth yet. It's not like there is a great little coffee shop in Galilee where Jesus is going to be hanging out to greet anyone who drops by. No, in Mark's gospel, Galilee is the place where ministry happened. Jesus taught in Galilee. He healed there. In Galilee, he pushed back the forces that eroded human flourishing. In Galilee, he pointed to a promised day when all that had gone wrong would be made right and God's biggest dreams for you and me would be realized. That's what Jesus' life was about. If I understand the text, Mark is telling us that's what Jesus' resurrection is about as well. His resurrection changes our lives *now*.

Mark tells us: Jesus will do the same thing with his resurrected life as he did with his earthly life. If you want to see him, look where ministry is happening; you will see him there. And the truth is: It is happening all around you.

When our kids were small, a favorite book was "The Napping House." It is a particular house where everyone is sleeping. While this never described our own house, we still read the book to give us hope. "The Napping House" tells of a snoring granny, a dozing child, a dog, a cat, a mouse and the only noncooperative houseguest—a wakeful flea. The kids liked the flea the best. With each page, a new resident of the house is introduced. The last to appear is the flea, who bites the cat, who scratches the dog... you get it. One by one, the commotion wakes everyone in the napping house, where now no one is sleeping.

Like most children's books, we read this one about a bazillion times. I was reading it once with Sarah and she said, "There's the flea." I said, "Not yet, Sarah. This is the page with the snoring granny... the flea comes at the end." She said, "No, daddy. There's the flea." I looked and there it was. I had never noticed it before, but the illustrator placed the flea on every page. You don't see it the first time through; it's just a flea. But once you know to expect the flea, you can't help but see it on every page.

Glimpses of the risen Christ are like that. They are all around us. We just need to train our eyes to see him, because he is doing the same work with his resurrection that he did with his life. He is drawing God's promised day a bit closer.

But the thing about resurrection is it often comes in small victories. The risen Christ shows up in moments of kindness and compassion. In moments when justice breaks free and the innocent are released, when the depression is escaped, when injuries to the heart are laid down. And if we have eyes to see, this is how God shows us what is to come. Like his early disciples witnessed little inbreaking of resurrection—of new life—we, too, can witness such inbreaking. But for now, it's mostly small victories.

When I was in seminary, I served a church as a director of youth ministry. I didn't have the wisdom of our own Zach Walker, but I tried. That youth group, like ours, took a ski trip every January. I had never snow skied before. I grew up in Georgia. We only ski on water and never in January. But how different could snow skiing be?

When I checked-in, they took my net worth and gave me skis and a lift pass. They told me ski school would meet on the west side of the lodge. Ski school sounded like a good idea. But Patrick Newman, an 8th grader, said to me, "Tom, Tom, Tom... really, Tom? Ski school?" I said, "What?" He said, "Tom, ski school is for losers. You will embarrass our entire group if you go to ski school." Here I was... feeling peer pressure from an 8th grader.

"But, Patrick," I said, "I have never skied." He said, "There's nothing to it, Tom. Just ride the lift to the top and come back down; it's natural." That's what he told me. "I'm skiing double-black if you want to come with me." I looked up the mountain and people seemed to be at ease with it. Little kids skiing down without any poles! I thought: How hard can this be? "Double-black sounds good," I said. "Yeah, let's do that."

I went to the ski lift. You know, getting on that thing is not as easy as it looks. They don't stop the lift. It just scoops you up. I tried to get on the ski lift, but just as the chair was nearing, I turned to see when to sit down. When I turned... how do I say this? It put parts of me just a bit wide. The next thing I knew, it had knocked me over and I was face-first in the snow. The guy running the lift threw the switch. It stopped the chair. But not just my chair, oh no. It stopped everyone on the lift. Of course, everyone on the lift turned around to see this guy from Georgia face down in the snow. I stood up, dusted myself off, waved to everyone and climbed into the ski lift. He threw the switch again and we were off.

There was a young woman seated next to me and she asked, "Do you ski often?" I said, "You will never believe it, but this is my first time." "Well, can I give you some advice? Because getting off the lift is not quite as easy as getting on," she said. "Keep your ski tips up. You will feel the ground and when you do, stand up. You will ski away."

"Got it," I said. Sure enough, I had my ski tips up.

I felt the ground. But I wanted to be sure it was time to stand up. I turned to ask, "Do I stand up now?" But she was gone. Then all of a sudden, I felt the ski lift begin to turn around. Have you ever ridden one of those lifts *down* the mountain? "How you doing?" "Good to see you." "Forgot my hat."

That evening, Patrick Newman asked, "Did you ski double-black?" "No, but I did learn how to get off the ski lift and I skied a slope called 'bunny' without breaking anything." When the battle is hard, you take small victories.

Resurrection is like that. Jesus wasn't just raised; he was resurrected to continue the work of ministry of bringing kindness and justice and joy. He was resurrected to make right all the things that have gone wrong. He was resurrected to make life beautiful and holy. And he is still doing that work. And Mark would say: Whenever you see it, it's Galilee. Whenever you see it, you see him.

In July of 2003, I preached at the memorial service for my grandmother. The following month, I preached the memorial service for my grandfather. They were married for 67 years and died five weeks apart. Each time, we gathered in the sanctuary of my father's childhood—where he was baptized and confirmed and where my grandparents never missed a Sunday. We read the "Lord is My Shepherd" and sang "For All the Saints." When the service ended, we adjourned to the fellowship hall where the Presbyterian women provided coffee and cookies.

As the reception was ending, the women started setting up for another event. They brought out plates and silverware. They spread tablecloths. The smell of casseroles wafted from the kitchen. I asked my grandmother's friend, Lake, "Is there a church group meeting tonight?"

"Not really. Tonight we are feeding the migrant workers." They were Mexican, mostly, passing through the state to harvest the Carolina peach crop. It's a \$90 million industry in South Carolina, but almost none of it gets to those who harvest the peaches. The migrants live in squalor and are never paid enough to feed their children. It's not slavery, but it's not far from it.

The Presbyterian women would feed about 35 workers and their children. After dinner, they would work on some English lessons.

I said, “Lake, you are doing a good thing.” She looked at me and she said, “I wouldn’t miss this. These children have nothing. They are caught in a system that grants them no future. But when we serve mac-and-cheese to these children and teach them a little English, it seems like Jesus is sitting right there at our table with us.”

“Lake, I think he is. I think he is.”

That was Mark’s experience. Mark knew we needed a glimpse of the risen Christ. So, Mark didn’t just tell us that Jesus was raised. He told us where to find him.

Share the love that is yours to share. Do the good that is yours to do. When you do, the victories may be small, but you will see him.