

# The Way of the Empty Tomb

## Mark 16:1-8

### Introduction

I once visited a family whose home turned out to be somewhat "off the grid." I listened carefully as my GPS gave me directions to their address, and I faithfully followed every instruction it said; that is, until it told me to turn down what appeared to me to be nothing more than a farm lane – a mud path that ran alongside a recently harvested field. The GPS said the path had a name. But I didn't see any street sign. All I saw was mud. I didn't say it out loud, but I was wondering:

Are you sure this is the right way?

In the classic movie "The Wizard of Oz," the Munchkins sent Dorothy on her way to the Emerald City with the instructions to "follow the yellow brick road." Like me, she followed her instructions faithfully until she came to a fork in that yellow brick road – a place where the yellow bricks headed off in two different directions. It was there she met the scarecrow who first directed her one way and then the other. Eventually the scarecrow concluded that he didn't know which way was the right way either, so he and Dorothy sang and danced and without any kind of explanation started down one of the two options. But was it the right way? Are you sure?

Throughout this Lenten season we have been focused on following a particular "road." It's not a yellow brick road or even a muddy farm lane. We have simply called it "THE WAY," based on the teaching of Jesus in John 14:6:

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6)

We made a commitment to follow Jesus along THE WAY because we believe Him when He says that:

The WAY OF JESUS is the ONLY WAY that will lead us to God.

Over these last seven weeks we have seen how, throughout His earthly ministry, Jesus taught His disciples – and us – how His way was different from every other way. No other religion or life philosophy can take us to the places the WAY OF JESUS will take us. And it is especially true that only the WAY OF JESUS can take us to heaven.

No one comes to the Father except through Him.

A few months before the events of this Holy Week, Jesus began talking to His disciples about where those final few miles of HIS WAY would lead them. He told them:

From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and

the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. (Matthew 16:21)

Because they had been raised in a religious culture that offered them a DIFFERENT WAY, they believed the Messiah would be a military hero who would overthrow all of their enemies, So the WAY of Jesus didn't make sense and it most definitely didn't sink into their heads. They felt a need to correct Jesus.

Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!" (Matthew 16:21-22)

In other words "That's the wrong road, Lord." Your road doesn't go that way. There is NO WAY, Lord, that YOUR WAY will lead to a cross and it will NEVER lead to an EMPTY TOMB.

But Jesus knew better. He was right. All along the WAY OF JESUS has led us to places we didn't expect. And this week we have seen again how the WAY OF JESUS leads along a path that will see Him arrested, tried, tortured and crucified. And ultimately THAT WAY leads on to an EMPTY TOMB.

There are many roads in this world that will take you to many different places.

- The world will even tell you that those other ways will eventually lead you to God.
- But the Gospel lesson today makes it very clear that unless those other roads take you to the EMPTY TOMB, those roads are the wrong way.
- Only the way of Jesus leads you to God – "No one comes to the Father except by me."
- And it is only THE WAY OF JESUS that brings you to the EMPTY TOMB.

Now let me tell you why the EMPTY TOMB is important.

### **TRUTH #1: ONLY THE EMPTY TOMB BRINGS HOPE TO OUR HOPELESSNESS**

Our Gospel text begins in an atmosphere of hopelessness. Three women, all close followers of Jesus, got up "very early" to go to a tomb. They were on their way to do a task that had to be done.

- Jesus was dead. They had witnessed His death firsthand. And now the body of Jesus had to be embalmed.
- Embalming was the responsibility of friends and family. It was up to them to get it done.

On that first Easter Sunday morning, I can imagine them walking along in silence. The worlds were shattered. Every hope they had about Jesus was gone. You don't talk much when your world is shattered. Then one of them asked a question:

Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb? (Mark 16:3)

Now, on top of their grief, they started to pile on the realization that they would not be able to do the most basic thing they could do. Still they walked on. They didn't know it at the time, but they were WALKING IN THE WAY OF JESUS. They were walking to the EMPTY TOMB where their hopelessness would be replaced with hope once again.

The story is told of a young mother who found herself on the last train out of Poland during Hitler's regime. She had with her a two-year old toddler and her newborn baby. The bombing was fierce, and the train had to stop many times for the passengers to take cover. A trip that should have taken a few hours took several days.

Along the way the train ran out of food and water. Consequently, when they arrived at their destination, the baby was starving and ill. A group of nuns met her there and took the baby to their hospital, while the mom processed all the immigration paperwork. The mother felt great relief at the apparent reprieve.

But the joy was short-lived. The next morning she was given the news that the hospital had been bombed during the night and that her baby had not survived. The mother was given a flashlight to search for her baby's body.

What a tragic scene. Imagine the hopelessness of it all. The mother is crying loudly, together with many others in the same situation. Suddenly, she heard another cry - the sound of an infant. Could it be? She ran to where the sound came from and there in the rubble she found her baby ... alive.

Life without the EMPTY TOMB would provide the same sense of hopelessness. That's what Easter does. Easter changes the mood of the crucifixion into joyful rejoicing.

- That same hope pours into every hopeless heart as we today make our way here ... to the empty tomb.
- No matter what you are facing, there is hope because the tomb is empty.

Christ is risen! That makes all the difference.

## **TRUTH #2: ONLY THE EMPTY TOMB OFFERS YOU A SECOND CHANCE**

Look at verse 7:

But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him ... (Matthew 16:7)

By this time in the story, Jesus has 11 disciples remaining. The 12<sup>th</sup> disciple – Judas – learned too late that his way was not the way of Jesus and he chose to end his life. A sad ending. You can read about it in Matthew 27.

- Judas didn't live long enough to know this truth.

Out of the remaining 11 disciples, only one is singled out in the angel's instructions to the women at the tomb. Just Peter. Tell the disciples and Peter.

If you know the story of this week, you know that Peter had messed up big time. He had made some powerful promises that he would protect Jesus no matter what.

- But when the pressure was on, he denied even denied knowing who Jesus was. And he denied Jesus three times.
- Peter couldn't forgive himself. How could he ever be forgiven by Jesus for something like that?

But what Peter did not understand yet was that the WAY OF JESUS leads to the EMPTY TOMB.

- What PETER didn't understand was that every sin – every shortcoming – every failure – is forgiven because the tomb is empty.
- The cross was the place of sacrifice, but that sacrifice would not be complete if Jesus remained dead. Every Passover Lamb died. The final victory is in the resurrection. THE EMPTY TOMB.

No other religion, no other way, offers you an EMPTY TOMB, so no other way than THE WAY OF JESUS can offer you the second chance that Jesus can.

One devotional writer posted this description:

When was the last time that you were given a second chance? For me, it was just the other night. I had been struggling with a problem in my life. I went into my room and prayed, I said:

“God please help me. You know that I can't handle this situation on my own. I need you; I need the Lord most high to set me free. Forgive me. Amen.”

I told God that I needed him to give me a second chance, a chance to change, and like Ebenezer Scrooge on Christmas Eve, it came with a price. The spirits of Christmas Past, Present, and Future visiting was the price Scrooge paid. My price paid was the blood of Jesus, shed on the cross and secured by His resurrection three days later.

I prayed for God to give me a second chance. I asked Him to take me, mold me, and shape me into what he wanted me to be. I have learned in my short ministry and life, that God hears those prayers and acts on them almost immediately. Right now, I'm living my second chance.

Today we celebrate an empty tomb. No matter what you may have done, thought or said, Jesus invites you to WALK IN HIS WAY ... Come to the empty tomb.

## **APPLICATION**

It was Lewis Carroll, author of the stories about “Alice in Wonderland” who famously said:

If you don't know where you are going, any road will get you there. (Lewis Carroll)

Attempting to quote that famous line, the New York Yankees legendary catcher Yogi Berra said:

If you don't know where you are going, you will end up someplace else. (Yogi Berra)

Both statements are true.

But I know where I want to go. Every follower of Jesus shares the same intended destination. I want to go to heaven. And the only way to get there is to walk in the WAY OF JESUS.

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6)

If you would like to know more about this, I invite you to talk with me. Let's pray ...

Lord Jesus, you are the way and the truth and the life. Help me this day to put my trust fully in you and to follow you in the JESUS WAY.

Amen.