

“And Peter” – Best News Ever!
Mark 16:1-8
November 20, 2022 West Valley Pres

1. Connection to last week

A. Last week we heard about Peter’s epic fail – about how he was sure he would never deny Jesus; yet when it came right down to it, that’s exactly what he did. And we heard that he broke down and wept, when he realized that fear led him to do the very thing that he said he would never do.

B. He was not there when Jesus was crucified, died, and buried. And he was not there when the angel appeared at the empty tomb. Perhaps he was too ashamed of himself, or too afraid of being recognized, or maybe both.

C. But this is one of the things that happened while Peter wasn’t there. READ MARK 16:1-8.

When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome brought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. They had been saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?” When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, “Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.” So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

2. Yes, I’m sure the women were very much afraid. Seeing an angel, even in human form, and hearing the angel speak to you, is enough to knock the breath right out of you. There’s a reason why the first thing angels always seem to say is, “Don’t be afraid.”

3. But the women didn’t stay silent forever.

A. We know they didn’t, because all the gospels tell us that it was Jesus’ female followers who were there as he died; they were the ones who saw where he was buried; they were the ones who first saw the empty tomb. Women were the witnesses to the most important thing that has ever happened on this earth. If they had stayed silent, we wouldn’t have known about it. Afraid though they might be, they did eventually gather their courage and spread the news, as the other 3 gospels tell us.

B. Why doesn’t Mark say that? Well, the most ancient versions of the gospel of Mark that we have – which are in Greek- don’t conclude at the usual end of a sentence. They conclude on the word “for”. Literally, the last sentence is, “they were afraid, for”. We don’t know why that is. If you’re interested, I can tell you more about that, later.

C. Regardless, it’s clear that the women did at some point gather their courage and speak up.

4. The angel said, “Go tell his disciples AND PETER.” How do you think Peter felt when the women relayed that message to him? “And Peter” – how do you think he felt? (wait for responses?)

A. Was that bad news? Was he singled out as an afterthought? Sort of like, “You all are invited to come up to Galilee and visit with me. And, oh yes, you over there, you can come too”? Was it like that? No, indeed!

a. After all, the other disciples had their own epic failures to confront. Peter was at least in the courtyard when Jesus was being tried at the high priest’s house. He was at least there to be accused, and then deny. Most of the others were hiding. They weren’t even there to be accused.

b. The fact was, they had all failed Jesus in their own ways.

B. So, “And Peter” is NOT bad news. “And Peter” is in fact the best news ever!

a. As we’ve seen, Peter was an impetuous man.

b. Though Jesus had told him, “Truly I tell you, this day, this very night, before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times,” Peter vehemently insists otherwise. He insists, “Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you.”

c. Yeah. He will. He did. He went and did the very thing Jesus told him he would. And weeping his heart out afterward would not undo what he had done.

d. How would you feel, if you were him? Shame? Guilt? Like you’d never want to show your face again? Like you don’t deserve a place among his disciples because you’ve let him down so badly? Peter was lost in darkness at this point. Maybe as dark as the black borders on either side of the picture in the bulletin.

C. But, “And Peter” means that he does not have to be lost. God still includes him among the disciples. God sends a message, via the angel, telling Peter so! “You are still part of this!”

a. “And Peter” was a window of light into his darkness of soul. “And Peter” was reassurance and hope in the midst of shame and self-condemnation. “And Peter” was a way of saying, “All is forgiven; do come home.”

b. Peter was welcomed back from his self-exile. He is forgiven. He is restored. And his feet are put back on the paths of righteousness.

c. And not only that. Jesus publicly reinstates him, as well. Remember that the angel told the women to tell the disciples to go to Galilee, because Jesus will see them there, as he said he would? Well, the disciples do go to Galilee and they do see Jesus at various times. One of those times was on the shore of the lake at sunrise, as John’s gospel tells us. There, Jesus gave Peter the chance to publicly declare his love, three times, to revoke those three denials. And then Jesus reinstates Peter by saying, “Feed my lambs. Tend my sheep. Feed my sheep.”

c. And that’s exactly what Peter did, for the rest of his life on this earth.

d. Plus he trained others to serve as shepherds as well. Remember that in Chapter 5 of his first letter, Peter told the church elders to “tend the flock of God”, just as Jesus had told him to do. And he gives them advice on how to shepherd God’s people.

e. So “And Peter” didn’t just affect him. It also affected all the people whom he trained, who came after him.

D. Those two words, “And Peter”, open a window of light into Peter’s darkness. They restore Peter’s soul. They put him back on the right paths, for Jesus’ sake, for the sake of all whom Peter will serve and direct and guide, for the sake of the church.

E. “And Peter” was also a window of light into the darkneses of soul for the other disciples too. They too failed Jesus. They too were ashamed. So if there is forgiveness for Peter, there is also forgiveness for them. If there is light for Peter, there is also light for them. They don’t have to live in the darkness of guilt and shame. They can live in the light of forgiveness that makes a whole new life possible.

5. “And Peter” was life-giving, light-bringing forgiveness for all the disciples back then. What about now? Do people experience this light in the darkness now?

A. Absolutely! It happens all the time! Remember a couple of months back, when members of Teen Challenge came and shared some testimonies with us in worship? They were all about the window of light shining into their darkness of despair, and changing their whole lives.

a. For example, Brandon writes on their website, “I grew up in Las Vegas and had a good life. The first time I tried drugs was with a friend, and from there I moved to harder drugs. I got hooked on any drugs I could get my hands on. At the lowest point in my life, I lost everything and was in jail because of my addiction. Since Teen Challenge, God brought my family back into my life and changed and renewed my mind. I completed the TC program and began working at TC to help others like me. TC has really helped sustain me in my personal growth, by giving me opportunities to minister to students and interns as well as being a part of the community. In 12-step recovery, they say “You can’t keep what you have unless you give it away”. Here at TC, you see that truth in action.”

b. As another example, Katelyn writes, “My parents are amazing and godly people. They loved one another and always provided for our family. Despite all this, I felt depression, loneliness, and hurt when I was older. After trying alcohol when I was 18, it numbed those negative feelings, at first. Since being at TC, I have learned that my identity is only in Jesus. I’ve learned to love and respect myself. I’m a woman of compassion, mercy, and love. I have found the love I was looking for in Jesus. After completing the program, I plan on serving the ministry of Teen Challenge as God leads me!”

B. And our church helps to support those transformations. “And Peter” wasn’t just for Peter. It wasn’t just for the other disciples. That personal forgiveness is also for Brandon, and Katelyn, and all the millions and billions of others who have trusted Jesus down through the centuries. All who have received the light of Jesus have had their eyes turned away from the black walls of guilt and despair. All who have received the forgiveness of Jesus can now see through the light of Jesus. And the light of Jesus leads them to rejoice in new possibilities.

6. “And Peter” was the best news ever for Peter and the rest of the disciples in the midst of their failures. It has been the best news ever for the folks at Teen Challenge in the midst of their failures. And it’s also the best news ever for us!

A. Last week Pastor Morgan reminded us that failure isn't optional; we all fail, and we all have things in our lives that we are ashamed of and would rather not talk about. I'm not going to ask you to talk about them. But I do ask you to bring them to mind. Let's all pray silently for 30 seconds. Let's ask God to show us to ourselves, and ask God to point out those things in us that need to be redeemed and transformed. (pray)

B. Tell his disciples – and (Janet). Tell his disciples – and (Hardy, Nancy, Rob, Debbie, etc.)

C. Just as the risen Jesus went ahead of the disciples to Galilee, where they lived, so he also goes ahead of us where we live. In fact he is right here, right now. Not to reproach us. Not to condemn us. But to forgive us, and restore us, and reinstate us. He is here to shine light into the darkest corners of our souls, and open to us new windows of opportunity. That, my friends, really is the Best News Ever.

7. And how should we respond? Well, we could start by saying "Thank you!"

A. Thanksgiving is coming up on Thursday, right? Traditionally, we thank God for harvests, and food, and families, and homes, and life. And that's good. Those are blessings for which we should thank God. And not just once a year, either, but every day.

B. And. How about, this Thanksgiving, we also thank God for raising Jesus from the dead? How about if we also thank God for the forgiveness we have through Jesus? How about if we thank him for shining the light of forgiveness into the darkest corners of our souls? How about if we also thank God for including us in the great company of the redeemed? How about if we thank him for the Best News Ever? Let's pray.

Almighty God, we thank you, for in Jesus, you have included us together with all the disciples throughout the ages. Like everyone else, we have done things we should not have done; we have failed to do things we promised to do; and the darkness of despair is no stranger to us. Thank you for the forgiveness that Jesus made possible. Thank you for his light that shines into us. Thank you for new hope and new possibilities. Thank you, O God, for the Best News Ever, through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.