

“When Fear is Good”

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Jesus intends to surprise you...constantly.

Mark 16:1-8

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The F-word – Pastor Bob Thompson

Earlier this week I conducted a survey asking for Easter memories and thoughts about today’s service. The most interesting result was when I asked respondents if they think today’s Easter service should directly address the international crisis we’re facing. 53% answered, “Don’t even mention it.” Since Pastor Paul and I are sharing the sermon time today, I can’t speak for him, but I will try hard not to mention the “C-word” or the “P-word.” However, I am going to have to use the “F-word.”

This reminds me of a legendary story in our family as related by my brother David. When his six children were young, David was church-shopping and tried out a small church. His wife was sick that day, so David was the spiritual hero bringing the whole gang to church. After the service, David was greeting the pastor when his daughter Jenna interrupted David with the exclamation, “Dad! Max said the F-word!” Humiliated, David gathered the kids and slinked away, thinking, “I guess we’ll never go back to that church again.”

When all the kids were in the car, David confronted his son. “Max, why did you use the F-word? Where did you even hear that? You know we don’t talk like that in our family!” Backed into a corner, Max answered, “Dad, I won’t ever say ‘fart’ again!” David said he almost turned the car around to tell the pastor, “It was ‘fart’! He said ‘fart’!”

The “F-word” I will use is “fear.” But I promise you, we’d be talking about *this same* F-word even if nothing had changed over the last six weeks.

This F-word is all over Mark's version of Easter morning. What I'm going to do is invite you to ask, "When is their fear good?"

Five fears – Pastor Bob Thompson

1. The fear of not being prepared (1). Is that a good fear?

We learn in verse 1 that three women go out to buy spices to anoint Jesus' body. It's Saturday evening at this point, 24 hours since Jesus was buried in the tomb. Joseph and Nicodemus did all that was really necessary according to tradition.

In Mark's gospel, we first meet these women at the cross (15:40), but we also learn that they and "many other women" had been traveling with Jesus and his disciples all along. If you've always pictured Jesus and twelve guys hanging out for three years, who do you think was making sure they had food and money and that they put out the campfire before they left? The women, the planners.

These same women stayed to the end and saw where Jesus was laid. But what were they doing in the 24 hours since? What women do. While the men are apparently hiding and isolated, the women are comforting each other and trying to figure out what they could possibly do. They decide they will head to Jesus' tomb at first light Sunday morning to anoint his body with what we would call essential oils.

But if it was going to happen Sunday morning, they had to go out Saturday night and buy the stuff. They did it because they had a fear of being unprepared. Is that a good fear? I would say yes. I come to every Saturday and Sunday with a fear that I won't be prepared to lead worship and preach. It motivates me to prioritize.

2. The fear of not having enough help (2-3). Is that a good fear?

They make their way to the tomb early Sunday morning. They know where it is; they were just there. What they're worried about is who will roll away the stone.

These massive grave stones were like giant rock wheels, set in a channel. It was relatively easy to roll the stone into place – remove the chock and let gravity do the work. To roll a ton of rock uphill from the mouth was much harder. Maybe they thought the guards would help or the disciples would show up or there would be random people in the garden. If they had to, they'd push as hard as they could.

Almost always the fear of not having enough help is unfounded. God shows up – through other people, through supernatural strength and endurance, or just through the capacity to let go of the task. This fear is usually unnecessary.

3. *The fear when you're startled (4-5). Is that a good fear?*

They round the corner and are relieved to find out the stone has been rolled away. But don't imagine them now giddy with excitement. They still expect to duck into a dark cave and find a dead body wrapped head to toe in a linen cloth.

Instead, they find a young man in bright white clothes. It's the same as if you open a casket and the guy sits up. You would not be comforted.

You and I know from the other gospels he's an angel, but Mark doesn't use that word. It's not Jesus, but he's young and vibrant and I expect grinning from ear to ear. Mark says the women were "alarmed." The word he uses is the same one used of Jesus in the Garden when an overwhelming dread abruptly grips him. The idea behind the word is the suddenness of either terror or awe.

When you are totally dumbfounded about something completely unexpected, that's fear. I think it's a good fear. God wired us that way.

4. *The fear when Jesus isn't where you last saw him (6-7). Is that a good fear?*

The young man makes several statements that are the very heart of why we're here on Easter Sunday. "Don't be alarmed" (same word as the last verse) he says, as if it were that easy. "You have the right tomb. You're looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. (Jesus was as common a name then as "Bob.") He has risen! He is not here. Look for yourself. On your way now, go tell his disciples and Peter, 'Get out of here and head to Galilee. He told you he'd meet you there.'" Indeed he had, right before he predicted Peter's denial. He had said, "You will all fall away...but after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee" (14:28). I am not surprised they missed that.

That Jesus is not where we last saw him is not a reason for fear. It's a good thing. Do you think any of these women said later to Jesus, "Why weren't you in that cave all wrapped up like we expected?" When we don't find Jesus where we last saw him, doing the things we expected him to do, where we find him will be so much better!

5. *The fear of an uncertain future (8). Is that a good fear?*

As the women leave the tomb, Mark uses three words to describe their fear. "Trembling" is what your body feels during an earthquake or when a hydrogen plant blows up in your town. They are shaking like the ground under their feet. "Amazement" is the word "ecstasy" in Greek. It describes being in a trance. Then there's the plain old F-word "fear." Rendered speechless, the women are awestruck.

This is where the best ancient manuscripts of Mark end. In my English Bible, the last word in Mark's gospel is, "afraid." This abrupt ending has puzzled Bible readers and commentators for 2,000 years. There are several possibilities. One is that something happened to Mark – he might have been killed in Rome or fallen suddenly ill and never

got to finish. Another is that his ending was lost. This so bothered some early copyists of Mark that they pieced together stories from the other gospels and added a proper ending. We'll look at that ending next week.

For today, I want you to consider the possibility that Mark intended to finish right there, with the F-word, "fear." Why would I say that?

First, the "fear" theme in response to Jesus is common to Mark's gospel. Mark constantly reminds us that Jesus is amazing, frightening, astonishing. What he says and does will render you speechless. Being comfortable with Jesus is not the right response to reading the Gospels. Being startled by him is. There's no more startling event – even after he's predicted it multiple times – than the empty tomb and the declaration, "He has risen! He is not here."

Maybe Mark by this abrupt ending is telling us, "Stop thinking you have Jesus figured out. Stop telling him what he needs to do in order to alleviate your fears and bring you peace. Let him surprise you. Sorry about all those essential oils you bought to anoint a dead body. A living Savior is a surprise, but it's SO much better!

Second, fear is good when it *moves* you. All fear *can be* good if it prompts action. The fear of being unprepared is good if it makes you prepare. The fear of not having enough help is good if it causes you to pray, to ask others, to let go of some tasks you can't get done. The fear of Jesus being somewhere or doing something you didn't expect might be the best fear of all if it makes you run – away from the tomb of your very limited understanding of who Jesus is and what he can do.

The difference he makes – Pastor Paul Cummings

What difference does it make that Jesus is alive? What difference in your daily life does it make that Jesus lives? How does that affect how you pray? How does that affect how you live your life among other Christians or among non-Christians? How does that affect your thought process?

First, Jesus has no needs. When I was in college and would visit my southern grandmother, she would ask "What do you need?" I would end up leaving with a fishing hat, a tie, and leftovers from the refrigerator.

Jesus is alive! We worship a God who needs nothing. He has no needs.

In verses 1-3, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome left the house to go and "do something" for Jesus. During Jesus' incarnate ministry, they did things for Jesus all of the time. Now that he is risen, he is beyond needs. He doesn't have any needs.

This is a great correction when we think about our relationship with Jesus. We don't just believe in Jesus, we obey Jesus, we serve Jesus, we give in Jesus' name, and

we worship Jesus. He needs none of that. He simply desires it because it is the greatest thing for us to glorify God. It's also what's best for us. The beauty of obeying God—it honors him and it's the best life we have. He doesn't need it. He simply desires it.

A couple of weeks ago, I passed by a church's sign that said "Take time to pray. Jesus gets lonely too." Nope! Absolutely not. Jesus does not get lonely. He is God. He transcends need. He has no need.

Psalm 121 says God neither sleeps nor slumbers. As someone that struggles with sleep, I would love to not have to have that need. God is beyond that need. In Psalm 50:12 God asks, "If I were hungry, do you think I would trouble you? No. I am beyond those needs."

This absolutely affects how we see our obedience, our giving, our worship, our serving, and our prayer. Every other religion in the world is worshipping to fulfill a need. Someone needs to do something to keep it going.

Because Jesus is beyond our needs, it means that when he wants and desires us to have a relationship with him—for us to be forgiven, purified, and sanctified so that we can be with him—he is doing it from the purest, loving motives just so that he can have us. He doesn't need us. He simply wants us.

Second, Jesus is alive to our needs. We have become numb to the phrase "Jesus is alive." Growing up Baptist, we didn't always say "Christ is risen. He is risen indeed." Now you hear it all the time. The idea that we have become callous to saying "Jesus is alive" reminds us that there are different levels or depths to life. Everywhere from a one-cell organism to grass to a tree and all the way to the other end of the spectrum to a person who is living, able to interact and produce logical thoughts and has a soul.

When I first got a bow and arrow, I took the suction cup off of the arrow and whittled the end into a sharp point. I really wanted to shoot something that was alive. My mom said, "You can't shoot something that is alive," and I had to settle on a tree,

Jesus is alive to the depths of our need. He is aware and alive to the depths of all our needs—to our need for grace, peace, forgiveness, and to our overall need for reconciliation to the Father. He is alive to every need large and small.

In verse 7, Jesus tells the women, "Give this message to the disciples including Peter." Don't miss that— "including Peter." Peter, who since late night on Thursday into Friday morning, has been racked with grief, guilt, and despair over disowning Christ.

Jesus—who was fresh off the Cross and the resurrection, defeating sin, death and hell, descending into the grave and coming back—still has his friend foremost on his mind. After having done all that, Jesus is aware of what Peter most needs to hear. He isn't just aware of it; he speaks to Peter's greatest need because Jesus is alive to the

depths of the needs that we have. Jesus is so alive. He's so alive that he is completely in touch with exactly what we need and what we need to hear at all times.

When we get numb to the phrase "he is alive," we harden our hearts to the idea of obeying Jesus because we feel like he is alive like a tree. We think of him as alive like a tree - alive but not aware. That is simply a greater invitation to sin. No. Jesus is alive as a person, a divine Person, aware of everything perfectly all the time.

How different would you pray knowing that Jesus is alive to your needs? How differently would you live among believers or non-believers around you if you lived fully aware that Jesus is alive to your needs? How differently would you treat your finances? How differently would you treat obedience knowing God is alive to your needs?

The greatest need that we have is forgiveness of sin. He's already taken care of that need on the cross. Just like he speaks the tender word to Peter, he speaks it to you: "I'm aware of your needs. I will meet every one of them."

Third, Jesus is accessible. Because Jesus lives we can know him and have access to him. Notice I didn't say know *about* him. We can know him and have access to him. In verses 6-7, he is alive; you will see him.

In this world when it comes to people, there are two problems—knowing them or accessing them. Some people we need are dead. We can know about them but we can never know them. It's impossible. Others are alive but inaccessible. I know so much about Michael Jordan but I don't know him because he is not accessible to me.

Because Christ is alive and because we know that what he taught about the Holy Spirit (John 16:15) we can not only know Jesus but have access to him.

In "Good Will Hunting" with Robin Williams and Matt Damon, Robin Williams' character is trying to get Matt Damon's character to understand that he needs people. "Who do you have to interact with? Who will push back at you or keep you in check?" Damon answers, "Well I have the greats—Voltaire, Socrates, Locke." Robin Williams says, "That's fine but dead people tend not to push back."

We need Jesus. We must know him and have access to him because we are sinful people. We need a Savior who tells us "That's not the best life for you." "That does not bring me glory." Christ is knowable, and he's accessible

The world is asking why, and we can say, "Because." We can have peace because he lives. We can have hope because he lives. We can have joy because he lives. Jesus Christ is not in the tomb. He has risen! Amen.