

## Easter Expectations

### Mark 16:1-8 (NIV84)

<sup>1</sup> When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. <sup>2</sup> Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb <sup>3</sup> and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?" <sup>4</sup> But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. <sup>5</sup> As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed. <sup>6</sup> "Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. <sup>7</sup> But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'" <sup>8</sup> Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

Is Easter living up to your expectations? Did you get the scrumptious breakfast with bacon and eggs and pancakes and orange juice like you were hoping? Did the egg hunt go as planned? Is family arriving on schedule? Are your Easter expectations being met?

The women coming to Jesus' tomb on that very first Easter morning had expectations. "When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body." (verse 1) The women expected to give Jesus' body a proper send off, pay him their respects and show him their love by adorning his body with special spices since they didn't get a chance to on Good Friday when he was first entombed. On their way to Jesus' tomb "they asked each other, 'Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?'" (verse 3) They expected the stone to still be in the same place that they saw it on Friday. It shouldn't be moved. Nothing should have changed. The long and the short of it was that the women expected Jesus to still be dead.

What do you expect for your Easter Sunday by choosing to come to Light of the Valley this morning? Did you expect a breakfast that you didn't have to cook, or in reverse did you expect a breakfast that you actually had to cook and serve, unlike the typical Sunday morning? Did you expect an Easter egg hunt? Did you expect the family to all come together for church? Did you expect to fulfill your duty to Mom and make her happy by coming to church today? Do you expect an uplifting message that will make you feel better about yourself and your life by the time you leave? Do you expect that after today everything will simply go back to normal?

All of us came here this morning with expectations. I don't know if they will all be met for you today, but are we coming to Easter Sunday with the right expectations? Did the women – Mary, Mary Magdalene, Salome, and the others – did they have the right expectations?

On the one hand, I think we would all agree that previous experience has taught us and them to expect that a dead body stays dead and thus stays where you left it. Dead bodies don't get up, dress themselves, or come out of their tombs. They stay put and rot.

On the other hand, though, these women are disciples of Jesus. They heard his teachings. They supported him throughout his ministry. How many times had Jesus taught about his impending resurrection from the dead? At least three times just in Mark's gospel Jesus explicitly teaches his disciples, his followers, that he will be handed over to the chief priests and the like and die but will rise again in three days. Jesus had told them more than once that he would see them in Galilee after he died and was raised from the dead. When people asked for a sign to prove that what he said was true, he gave them the sign of Jonah. Just as Jonah was in the belly of the great big fish for three days, so also the Son of Man, Jesus, would be in the heart of the earth for three days. (Matthew 12:40) He even gave them another sign, this time using the great Temple building to foreshadow his resurrection. "'Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.' But the temple he had spoken of was his body." (John 2:19, 21)

The expectations had been set by God, and they were nature defying expectations. The women, the men, all Jesus' disciples should have seen the resurrection coming, camping out in tents near the tomb just waiting for Jesus to emerge from it. But they expected him to stay dead. Would we have expected anything different than those ladies did on that very first Easter morning?

What expectations has God given us that we don't incorporate into our lives, that we don't believe will happen? God has told us that we can come to with him anything and everything in prayer and that he answers us. "Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me." (Psalm 50:15) Do we expect him to answer our prayers, or do we offer prayers up more as long shots that are worth trying, but honestly I don't really think they'll work? God has told us to come to him when we are being tempted and

that he will help us. Yet, when we turn to him in prayer, do we tell ourselves that I need to roll up my sleeves and fight this temptation on my own because God is not going to make it go away?

How about in the reverse, expectations we have that God never gave us? Do you expect that going to church will make your life happier, that I've been down on my luck, not a whole lot has gone right lately, but if I start going to church, God will make it better, that coming to church will put you on God's good list? Do you expect God to forgive you even while you refuse to change your life to be in line with his will and his commandments?

When we form expectations outside of what God says and especially when we form them contrary to what he has said, done, or promised, we are showing God that we don't believe him, that his Word means nothing. We fall into this trap of not expecting God to do what he says he will do because so often we do not do what we are expected to do. We fail to live up to expectations. And when God does not live up to what we think we should do, we think he's just like us. He's nothing more than a human, faulty person who lets us down.

We all reach that point that when people are just not listening to us although we have clearly told them exactly what to expect, exactly what's going to happen and yet they act as if it never will, then we eventually give up and move on to someone who will listen. For not believing that God will keep his word or fulfill the expectations that he has given us, he should cast us away as unbelievers. In fact, why didn't he cast the women aside for their unbelief? If they didn't want to believe Jesus' words then, why would they believe him later? God's Word, his promises are wasted on people who form expectations contrary to them.

Even when we don't expect God to do what he has told us that he will do, he doesn't cast us aside. The women expected Jesus to still be dead. God responds by having an angel tell them that God did exactly what he was going to do. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'" (verses 6-7)

Even though we form expectations that are contrary to what God has promised, he doesn't cast us aside and give up on us and keep his Word from us. Instead, he continues to leave his Word with us and repeats it with this great story of Easter that hasn't changed in 2,000 years. I don't know if you expected it or not, but the Easter story that I am telling you today is the same one that was said last year. It will be the same one next year. When Easter Sunday rolls around, we can rightfully expect the unexpected, something that only God can do: a dead man comes back to life. God conquers death. God makes good on the expectations that he gives, especially on Easter.

This means that all of God's promises, all the things that he gives us to expect, will come true. He has never let anyone down who has hoped in him according to his promises, to the expectations he has given. You may feel alone, but God is actually with you because that is what he told you to expect him to do. You may feel like your prayer is a long shot, but he has given us the expectation that he hears and answers our prayers for Jesus' sake. We can come to him when we are being tempted and he promises to help us, even if we don't feel like we are being helped in the way that we expected.

Because Jesus rose from the dead on Easter Sunday, just as he said he would, we can expect God to do what we don't expect. God declares me not guilty of my sins before him, even though I know that I am guilty. Because Jesus rose from the dead, I will go to heaven even though I should go to hell for my imperfection. My death will mean I start a life that never ends even though it seems like my life is coming to an end. We can expect these things because God has set these expectations.

When you think that God is not living up to your expectations, go back to what he has said, what he has promised. He does not take these expectations away from you. He continues to give them to us just as he did on Easter Sunday. As the angel said, "But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'" (verse 7) They eventually went to Galilee and saw their risen Lord there. In this same way God continues to form our expectations around his promises, his Word, not our thoughts and expectations divorced from him.

When God tells you that he is going to do something, he is going to do it. You can expect it. He said that he was going to rise from the dead and he did. Nothing is impossible with God. So, this Easter, expect Jesus to do what he said he would do. He has conquered death for you and me and he will eliminate it completely. He has risen from the dead so that we would have life everlasting in heaven with him. Your sins are forgiven, just as he told you. Amen.