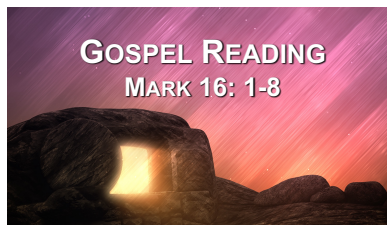


Risen Indeed

Mark 16: 1-8



Hear now from Mark's Gospel the account of Easter morning. From the 16th chapter, the first eight verses:

16 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. ² Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb ³ and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"

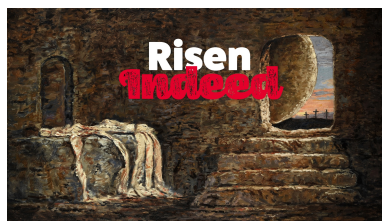
⁴ But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. ⁵ As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.

⁶ "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. ⁷ 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.'"

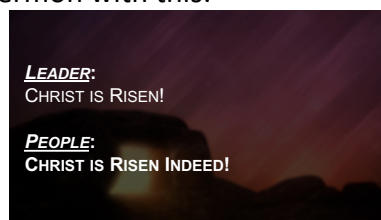
⁸ Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

These are the words of God for the people of God.

Thanks be to God.



We're going to start off today's sermon with this:



Christ is risen!

Christ is risen indeed!



“Christ is risen *indeed*.”

When we use the word “indeed,” we use it to emphasize the certainty of the previous statement, in this case that Christ is risen.

So you have put forth a statement that says, “Yes! This really happened!”

And to be honest, that’s all you really need to know for today. Nothing I say in most of this sermon is necessary to fully appreciate the importance of Easter.

Have you ever heard a pastor say that before?

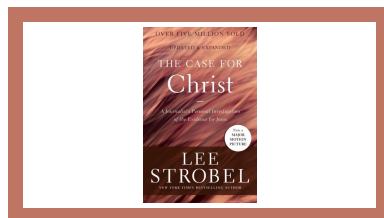
You’ve already said that Christ is really, certainly risen. Since it is by faith that we are saved, holding that faith is all we need to celebrate Easter and be Easter People.

But I do have more to add today. And what I hope is that what we discuss today does for you what it did for me. I hope you come away today with an increased faith that *this is real*, and I hope as you leave today you’ll think deeper about what this all means for your life.

You know, today is a day that we like to tell stories. Specifically, the biggest, most dramatic, most central story to our faith: that Christ is risen indeed.

Stories are a part of who we are. We read them. We watch them. We tell them. But so often, the stories we tell and the stories we consume are just that: stories.

What makes today’s story different? What makes today’s story *real* to the point we can say that indeed Christ is risen?

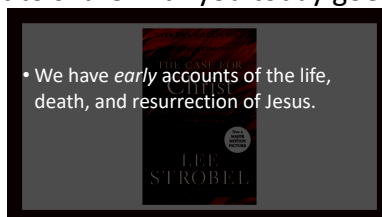


One of my favorite books is Lee Strobel’s *The Case for Christ*. It changed the way I read and see the Gospels, and I want to share with you two of the main points in that book.

Side note: once we get caught up on The Chosen Bible studies (by the way, our season three study begins April 15th), we’re going to be looking at this book in depth as a group. I’ve been wanting to do this for a couple years, actually.

In *The Case for Christ*, Strobel, who was an atheist at the time he began his research, worked as an investigative journalist at the Chicago Tribune newspaper, and he decided to use his skills to disprove Christianity. So he sets out to interview historical, academic, and even medical professionals about the story of Jesus Christ.

So, the first of these points I want to share with you today goes back to our Gospel reading.



The Gospel of Mark is widely considered to be the earliest of the Gospels. The prevailing belief is that the Gospel of Mark was written sometime in the 70s, with Matthew and Luke following in the 80s, and John coming up last in the 90s.

If Jesus died and was resurrected in the 30s, that means we're talking about a 40-year gap between the time of the crucifixion and resurrection and the time the first biography about Jesus was written.

That sounds like a long time. But consider this: we have biographies of major historical figures that were written centuries after the life of the person being biographized, and these writings are considered historically trustworthy.

The first biography of Alexander the Great, for example, was written 400 years after his death.

All of a sudden, 40 years sounds much different.

But even closer than that are many of the letters of Paul. In fact, in our reading from 1 Corinthians, Paul records a very early creed that tells of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

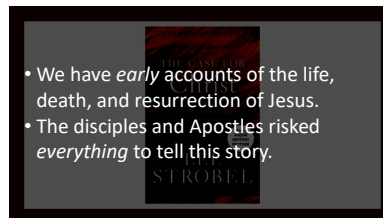
Biblical scholars have been able to date this creed to within 2 to 5 years of the resurrection. In antiquity, you don't get much closer than that.

We have very early accounts of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

But, have you ever talked to a fisherman right after a successful outing on their boat? You know that almost immediately, that bluegill kicked like a shark, and that 6 pound bass was at least 16 pounds.

This gets to the second point in *The Case for Christ* I want to share today.

How do we know that the Gospel writers weren't just making this all up or sensationalizing the story of Christ?



First, we have found that it usually takes generations for legend to creep into historical accounts. Stories need to be passed down from parents to children to grandchildren to great-grandchildren and beyond before legend starts to take over.

We already know that what is recorded in our Bibles was written so close to the events in question, within the lifetime of first-generation witnesses, that not nearly enough time has passed where we start to see legend added to historical accounts.

Also, though, let's go back to our fisherman friend. If you really press that fisherman, and I mean really push him to come clean – he'll probably hedge on his story eventually.

And that's because people will hardly ever risk themselves for what they know to be false. People will generally defend what they know to be true, but they will almost never put themselves in harm's way for what they know is false.

The disciples and Apostles risked *everything* to tell this story.

You might think, "Well, hey, they're setting up a church. They could have been wanting to become the televangelists of their day – a huge following, a fat bank account, a mansion, and whatever the first-century equivalent of a private jet would be."

But that's not what they got. In fact, the overwhelming majority of them faced imprisonment, beatings, and horrible deaths. They were seeking to set up churches in the most hostile of territories. They were going against the governments and religions of their day, and they knew the danger that brought.

If you want to know how this applies to John Mark, the author of today's Gospel text, he had a rope tied around his neck and was drug through the streets of Alexandria until he was dead.

And he wasn't even telling his own story. He was relaying Peter's account of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. And still, he knew it was so true that he was willing to die for it.

If these people were creating a story about Jesus for their own fame, we have to account for the fact that almost all of them faced death and did not change their story.

What that should tell us that we have accurate accounts of Jesus, the true Son of God, that he was born to the virgin Mary, that he suffered under Pontius Pilate, that he was crucified, died, and was buried. And on the third day, he indeed rose again.

Those were only two main points in *The Case for Christ*. There are more, all worth reading. I'll spoil the end for you: since writing his book, Lee Strobel has been a pastor, author, and professor of Christian teachings. It turns out his quest to disprove the story of Christ led him to a very different conclusion.



So what does all of that do for us? Like I said, you didn't need any of that for Easter to mean something to you. Faith is what we're after, and faith doesn't need any of that information.

So if you took me seriously and tuned out at the beginning, now it's time to tune back in.

I do hope, though, that if you heard any of that, it takes the stories we tell today and makes them more than just stories. I hope it makes them *real* for you.

I also hope that makes you pause to let the reality of it all sink in, because there's a lot that goes with that.

If we have established that these accounts of Jesus are real, then guess what? Everything they tell us about Jesus and about the things he said are also real.

That means that when Jesus said the only way for us to get to the Father was through the Son, that was real. He is indeed our Way, our Truth, and our Life.

That means that the reason for his death was real, that he indeed took our guilt to the cross to stand in our place.

That means that what Jesus said about sin is real, that it indeed leads to our death.

And, of course, that means that the resurrection is also real, that Jesus did indeed pay our penalty, and that through his sacrifice, we can be cleansed.

That carries with it *every* implication for our lives. That tells me that it matters what we do with our lives, that it matters who we trust and what we believe. Our sin matters, our need for forgiveness and mercy and grace matters, our Savior matters.

The Easter Story is so much more than just a story. We tell it over and over again, and we should. We need to. But sometimes we get used to hearing it. Sometimes doubt creeps in, and we wonder if any of this could really have happened.

The point of today's message isn't that we can prove all of this beyond the need for faith. We will always need faith.

The point of today is that sometimes, it's worth stepping back and looking at this all again with fresh eyes, with an open heart, with a new perspective. Sometimes it helps to let it wash over you anew, to let your wonder and amazement at this whole thing start fresh.

When that happens, when the reality of all of this seeps into every level of our being like that, it's hard to contain your excitement. It's hard to *not* live as an Easter People.

You will start to know that need to tell everyone what it has done for your life, and what it can do for theirs...all because Jesus Christ is risen indeed.

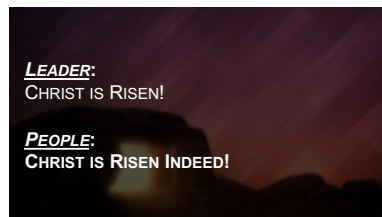
And with that, we're back where we started. We're going to end how we began.

But this time, as you say these words, and that one word in particular, I invite you to think about what you're saying.

I ask that you think about what it means for us to have a truly risen Savior.

I ask you to know in your heart that Easter is real, and that it means everything for us.

And so...



Christ is risen!
Christ is risen indeed!