

“Even Peter”

Mark 16:1-8

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Very early on Sunday morning, three women make their way through the stillness and approach the tomb: the last three disciples of Jesus Christ. A disciple is someone who follows, who dedicates their life to staying close to their teacher and master, studying their master's words and actions and then replicating those words and actions in their own life. And that means that these three women are the only disciples left. In those early days in Galilee, Jesus had so many disciples, you couldn't fight your way through the crowds surrounding him. A week ago, the entire city of Jerusalem turned out to watch him parade into the capital, surrounded by hundreds, thousands, of supporters, all calling out Hosanna. But all of them are gone now. The moment he was arrested, all his disciples deserted him. The moment he was arrested, all his followers stopped following, they abandoned him to save their own skins. No one stayed close to Jesus when he was being beaten and tortured, no one followed in his footsteps when those steps led to the cross. Even Peter, even Peter, his right-hand man, his most faithful friend and disciple, even Peter abandoned Jesus, not only through his actions, but with a public declaration, telling everyone within earshot over and over and over again, I am not this man's disciple. You couldn't make it any clearer. By Sunday morning, every single one of Jesus' disciples are no longer disciples, they have all stopped following. All except these three women. They were there on Friday, watching Jesus from a distance as he died. Now they're here on Sunday morning with one last act of devotion, anointing their master's

body with spices and perfume. And then they too will go home, the last disciples of Jesus Christ.

And when they reach the tomb, they find that the stone has been rolled away. Instead of the body of their master, they find an angel, dressed in white, sitting where the body is supposed to be, and the angel tells them that Jesus is no longer there – he's risen from the dead. He's alive. These women thought that the man they'd given their lives to follow was dead, and now they learn that not only is he alive, he's someone far more important than they had ever dreamed. And then the angel gives these three women, these three faithful disciples, one more task – go and tell the story of what has happened, go and tell the news that Jesus is alive and is waiting in Galilee, go and tell – his *disciples*.

And that's a strange task to be given, because really, every single one of Jesus' disciples is standing right there at the empty tomb. Every single one of Jesus' disciples has already heard the news, because they are the only ones who never stopped following Jesus, even when everything seemed broken and hopeless, when the tomb was sealed and darkness reigned, these three women kept following through Friday and Saturday to Sunday morning, and now they have all heard the news, all three of Jesus' disciples who never abandoned him, never betrayed him, never denied him. The rest of those fair-weather friends don't count as disciples any longer. They weren't there for Jesus when he was arrested, when he was suffering, when he was dying, so why should they hear the news now, now that he's alive, now that he's risen from the dead? They had their chance, and they blew it. They used to be disciples, but they aren't now, or else they would've found their way to the tomb themselves. It sure seems like every

single one of Jesus' true disciples have already heard the news straight from the angel, and there's no need to go and tell, because there are no other disciples left to hear the news.

And yet the angel makes it clear that God's definition of what it means to be a disciple is a little different from what we might have in mind. The angel tells the women to go and tell the news to all Jesus' disciples, even the ones who abandoned him on Friday. Even the ones who deserted him the moment things got tough. Even that particular disciple who three times denied ever knowing Jesus, who swore an oath before God and the entire city of Jerusalem that he was not, not, not a disciple of Jesus of Nazareth. Even Peter. Even Peter. Peter may not think he's a disciple of Jesus any longer, he might think that he's messed up so badly, denied Jesus so thoroughly that he could never come back, never apologize, never make amends for abandoning his friend in his hour of need. But according to the angel, even Peter is still a disciple. Even Peter gets to hear the news that Jesus is alive, that he's waiting in Galilee to meet with them again, so that together they can change the world. In the light of Sunday morning, in the light of the resurrection and the empty tomb, the brokenness and hopelessness of Friday look completely different. The disciples who abandoned Jesus on Friday morning thought that their actions in that moment would determine their identity forever and ever – Jesus was dead, and that meant they couldn't go back and change things, fix things, atone for their mistakes and start following again. But now that Jesus is alive, now that the tomb is empty, that means that what they did on Friday doesn't have to be the end of their story, the last word in their discipleship. What they did on Friday doesn't have to define them forever as failed disciples who fell away and never returned. Jesus is alive, and that means

they have a second chance to follow, a second chance to serve, a second chance to seek out their master and define their identities after his teaching, his power, his love. They can be disciples again. Even Peter.

So these three women are given the task to go and tell the news that Jesus is alive, to all his disciples, past, present and future – all those who once followed, all those who will one day follow, even the unlikely ones, even the failures, the deniers, the fair-weather friends, they're all out there waiting to hear the news, waiting to learn that God still has plans for them, Jesus Christ still wants to meet with them, waiting for these three women to go and tell. And yet you'll notice that at the end of our reading, at the end of the entire gospel of Mark, they're all still waiting. We're all still waiting. The gospel of Mark ends with these three women, the most faithful, most devoted followers of Jesus Christ, leaving the tomb in fear and uncertainty, and telling no-one. The gospel of Mark ends with a cliffhanger ending, with all of us wondering what will happen next. Who will they tell? Who will find out? Will these three women do what they've been called to do? Will they act like disciples and go and tell, or will they keep this news to themselves? And of course, the fact that we're all gathered here today is evidence that those three women did exactly what they were called to do – it took them a moment to deal with their fear and the shock of what they'd witnessed, but eventually they decided to go and tell – they went to all Jesus' disciples, anyone who had ever been a disciple, anyone who might possibly become a disciple, they went out into the world and told everyone, even Peter, that Jesus was alive. And together with Peter, and all those disciples who heard that news and decided to follow, those three women changed the world. They spread that news so far and wide that today, two thousand years later, we are

gathered as Jesus' disciples, sharing that news again – the tomb is empty. He is Risen! And today, we are called to the same work that those women were called to so many years ago. Go and tell his disciples that Jesus is alive, he is risen from the dead, he's waiting to meet with them and work through them to change their lives and the world forever.

And so often we hear that message, and we think we know who those disciples are that we are being sent to tell. We think that we should go and tell people who look like us, who act like us, who are already disciples just of a slightly different variety. We think that when we go and tell his disciples, it couldn't mean all those people we've decided aren't right for the church, all the people who have failed, who fall short of our ideals of what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. We have all kinds of criteria for who should hear the news we have to tell. And if we're being honest, just like those three women, a lot of it comes down to fear. Sometimes, we don't want to go and tell because we're not entirely sure we're disciples ourselves. We're not entirely sure we're good enough, faithful enough, brave and bold to qualify as disciples of Jesus Christ, because we've failed, over and over and over again, to share God's love and compassion and forgiveness with the people around us in the way we know we should. And yet no matter what we think disciples should look like, and no matter how far short of that standard we think we fall, in the light of Sunday morning, in the light of the empty tomb, of the risen Christ, our standards, our failures, none of that matters. What matters is that Jesus is alive, and he is calling all his disciples, all those who have abandoned him, betrayed him, denied him, all those hiding in fear and uncertainty, he is calling all of us to come and meet him in Galilee, come and meet the Risen Christ, the God of second chances, come be a

disciple again. That message is for all of us, every single one of us, Even Peter. Even you. No matter how far we fall short of God's love, no matter how badly we fail to be who we are meant to be, the promise of Easter morning is that our failure is not the last word. Our brokenness is not the last word. Jesus always gets the last word, and that word is always a word of life over death, love over fear, it is the word of grace and forgiveness, the word of welcome to the lost sheep returning home, the lost disciple finding their way back to Galilee to meet the Risen King of Kings. Our God is calling us to discover again that we are disciples of Jesus Christ, that no matter how we've failed, we can still share his love, we can still tell his story, we can still change the world. And all we have to do is just trust that his love is stronger than death, trust that his grace is stronger than our failure, and then get on the road and head for Galilee to meet the one waiting for us there. And on our way, go and tell everyone you meet about where you're going. They just might be a disciple too. Amen.