

## The Rumor of Hope

By Ray Stedman

Dr. Carl F. Henry, one of America's leading contemporary theologians, said recently of Jesus, "He planted the only durable rumor of hope amid the widespread despair of a hopeless world." It is from this sentence that we take the title for our study this morning -- "A Rumor of Hope."

As those of you who have been attending PCB regularly know, we have been studying in the Gospel of Mark, and have worked our way through to the end of the tenth chapter. But I want to skip ahead this morning to the sixteenth and final chapter, and take the Easter story from Mark's gospel. We will cover the intervening passages in later studies.

And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week they went to the tomb when the sun had risen. And they were saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the door of the tomb?" And looking up, they saw that the stone was rolled back; for it was very large. And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe; and they were amazed. And he said to them, "Do not be amazed; you seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He was risen, he is not here; see the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you." And they went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had come upon them; and they said nothing to any one, for they were afraid. (Mark 16:1-8 RSV)

There Mark ends his story. The footnote in the Revised Standard Version gives another ending for this Gospel which some of the other versions

have. I will not comment on it this morning; we will study it at a later date. But there the best of the early manuscripts end Mark's account.

You notice the chapter begins with the darkest day in human history -- that black Saturday when Jesus lay in the grave. But it ends with the women who had come to the tomb leaving filled with such joy and awe and exploding hope that they dared not breathe a word of it to anyone. When the close of the passage says "they were afraid," it would be a mistake to read it as though it means they were terrified, or threatened because they were not. The word for "astonishment," in the original Greek, is literally "ecstasy." They were caught up in an ecstasy of excitement and trembling awe at what they heard from the angel in the tomb.

It is this that sent them out to establish a rumor of hope in the midst of the hopelessness of mankind. I want to look with you now at this brief account from Mark, to see what it was that made these women change like this.

The account opens with the words, "And when the sabbath was past..." The other gospels do not mention the Sabbath, but Mark gives us this brief account of it. If we have any imagination at all, it would be easy to understand that *that* Saturday before the resurrection must have been the darkest day these disciples had ever experienced. What a dreary, interminable day it must have been! A day of shattered hopes, of broken dreams, of desolated spirits, and of wounded and frightened hearts. A dark and dreary day indeed, a day in which the future was grim and foreboding. All their brightest hopes had collapsed around them, all their choicest dreams had perished with the death of Jesus. These disciples, crushed, their hopes dashed, their dreams demolished, tried to live

through that dark Saturday with no hope for the future, no belief in the resurrection. Every act on that day must have been torture for them, with every fiber of their being crying out, "What's the use! Why go on?" It was a day they would never forget as long as they lived.

I think some of us have felt something of that. And you know, there are more human beings today who live constantly in the despair and hopelessness symbolized by that dark Saturday than have ever lived in the drama of Friday or the victory of Easter. Someone has called our present generation "Saturday's children," and it is an apt term. As you know, our great American cities are, for the most part, vast, teeming pools of human misery, where people live out their days in a kind of ritual dance toward death, without hope or illusion. In the midst of an increasingly godless world, despair grips people's hearts everywhere. Hopelessness and meaninglessness come crushing in on us from every side. Not even the most optimistic of the prophets and seers of today, either secular or sacred, in looking into the future, see any hope in the affairs of men as they are. We are indeed *Saturday's children*.

And yet, the amazing thing about this account is that when the time came to record these events, when the proper hour arrived for these disciples to sit down and write their accounts, this dark day had so dropped into the background, was so lost in the joy of resurrection, that the most they felt it necessary to say is only: "And when the sabbath was past..." Their hope had swallowed up their despair.

I want to examine with you why this was true, what it is that Mark records in this brief incident of the women coming to the tomb that so changed these women as to give them hope in the midst of their hopeless despair.

The first thing was that the stone was rolled away from the tomb. They came concerned and worried about that stone. Any of you who have been to the Garden Tomb in Jerusalem, where I think this event indeed took place, know that the stone is no longer there, but that you can see the

narrow grooved platform along which it was rolled, right in front of the tomb. And the entrance into the tomb itself is almost as tall as a man. The stone which covered the entrance to that tomb must have weighed at least a thousand pounds. It was indeed a very large stone, as the account tells us, and these women were naturally concerned about how to roll it away so that they might anoint the body of Jesus with the spices and ointments which they had brought. But when they arrived, the stone was already rolled back.

Matthew tells us that very early, long before daybreak, an angel had come and rolled back the stone, and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning bright and shining, so that he dazzled and dismayed the guards who had been detailed to watch over the tomb. They fell as dead men on the ground, and, then, as they recovered their senses, stumbled off into the darkness in fear. All of this had happened before the women arrived.

When they came, there was no sign of anyone, and the door of the tomb was open. That told them that something amazing had happened. At this point they did not know what it was, but they understood that something remarkable had occurred, for the stone was already rolled away, and the tomb was open.

Then, when they went into the tomb, the body of Jesus was gone! That which they had come to anoint was no longer there. This empty tomb has been the answer to all the arguments of skeptics for twenty centuries. No one has even been able to explain it. Every generation has tried. In our own day we have Schonfield's *Passover Plot*, as one of the most recent attempts to explain away the events of the crucifixion and the resurrection. But it, like all the others, relies upon that ancient lie circulated in the very first century by the soldiers, who were paid to say that the friends of Jesus had come and stolen his body away. No one has ever been able to explain how that could happen. That his enemies would steal it is impossible to believe, because they would gladly have produced it. And that his friends could do it is impossible to conceive, for there

were guards stationed at the tomb, and the stone was sealed with the Great Seal of Rome.

The most amazing thing of all, the thing that confronted these women as they went into the tomb, was the fact that though the body itself was gone, the grave clothes were still there, lying as though still wrapped around a body in the place where the body had been laid. The body seemingly had evaporated through the grave clothes; it was gone. It was evident that there was no body there, but the formation of the cloth was as though it were still wrapped around the body. The other gospels tell us that when these women left the tomb they ran to the disciples and told them the news, and Peter and John came running to the tomb. When they went in and saw the grave clothes, they were convinced that Jesus indeed had risen. The fact of these grave clothes has never been explained. No one has ever satisfactorily explained the conundrums and puzzles which arise with regard to these empty grave clothes.

And the words of the angel to these women contain the answer to all the skepticism of twenty centuries. For the angel said some things to them which answer most of the claims which have ever been raised in questioning the actuality of the resurrection. The first thing the angel said was, "This Jesus of Nazareth, this One who was crucified, this same one whom you seek, has indeed risen from the dead." Many of the attempts to explain this away say that the women went to the wrong tomb, or that they found the wrong person, or that the disciples invented another person, not the same Jesus, that the Jesus who lived and walked through the pages of the Gospels was crucified and lies yet in some unknown Syrian grave -- as Matthew Arnold put it, "Upon his grave, with shining eyes, the Syrian stars look down..." That whole question is answered here by the angel. He says to the women, "This very same Jesus, the One you knew from Nazareth, whom you accompanied about the hills of Galilee and Judea, the Jesus who was crucified, whom you saw on the cross with the nails in his hands and the blood running down his side, that same One whom you are seeking, is risen from the dead." That establishes the identity of Jesus.

Then he said to them, "He is not here." That is, "He is not only risen; he is not here." And in those words he makes very clear that, though Jesus is risen, there is nevertheless a very real tie with our humanity. He is not just a spirit. This is not a spiritual resurrection but a bodily resurrection. It was the body of Jesus that rose from the dead. There are cults and groups today that try to argue against that, who claim that what happened was that the spirit of Jesus rose, and he now lives spiritually only. But the Bible consistently defends the proposition that it was the very body which was put into the grave, dead, which also rose from the dead. "He is not here." He is a person yet, a human person with a human body -- changed, yes -- but still human. And in that human body he rose from the dead. That is the claim of Scripture. "Furthermore," the angel said, "he goes before you to Galilee." There is a specific geographical spot on the face of the earth, that you well know, where you will see him. He will be there when you get there. "Go and tell his disciples that he goes before you to Galilee." So the angel underscores the claims of Scripture that Jesus is alive, that he rose bodily, and that he is available in specific places.

The third thing the angel says is put in these extraordinary words that only Mark records: "But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee." That is a wonderful touch. What a gentle, tender word that is! The last time we saw Peter in this Gospel account, he was standing in the courtyard of the high priest during the trial of Jesus. And a little maiden, a little slip of a girl, kept following him around, saying, "I know you. You were with him, weren't you?" Peter kept denying it; three times he denied it. The last time she accosted him she said, "I know you're one of his, because you sound like a Galatiansilean." He was as marked as a Texan would be! This time Peter denied it with curses and oaths: "No! I don't know him! I've never met the man." Just then the cock crowed, and Peter remembered that Jesus had said, "Before the cock crows, you will have denied me three times." And the last we saw of Peter, he went out into the darkness of the night, weeping

bitterly. What a tender thing it is for the angel to say to these women, "Go and tell the disciples and Peter that he goes before you to Galilee." It puts him right back into the apostolic band.

What does this say to us? Well, that says that Jesus is available to individuals -- not just to the crowd at large, not just to the world in general, or the church, but to you. Put your own name in there, if you like. This accessibility to individuals has been the hallmark of Christianity ever since. Each one of us can know him personally, intimately -- not just as a figure of history, nor as a coming King, nor in a general sense, as we know about the President of the United States, but in that intimate, personal, real, conscious sense of knowing which we share in the most intimate communion of men.

The last thing the angel said was, "He is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you." That is, these are faithful words. Jesus had already promised that he would do this. This ought not to have taken them by surprise, because he had said that he would go before them to Galilee when he rose from the dead, and there he would meet them. The angel is here underscoring the reliability of the words of Jesus. He is absolutely trustworthy; he does what he says he will do. His promises can be believed. Whatever he said, he also fulfilled, and you can rely upon it to the very last letter.

Now, this is what changed these women. This is what filled them with hope, brought them from the very depths of dark despair to trembling ecstasy, so that they went out with gladness to spread this rumor of hope throughout the world -- the only durable rumor of hope that the world has ever known.

You are familiar with the story -- how the Gospel accounts tell us that just a few moments later, as Mary Magdalene lingered behind, there in the early morning light, Jesus appeared to her. At first she thought he was the gardener, but when he spoke her name, she knew who he was. He showed himself alive first of all to Mary. She went running with the news, and Peter and John came to the tomb and saw the

grave clothes, and were convinced. Then in the afternoon, he appeared on the road to Emmaus to two disciples, and that strange encounter took place where he walked with them and opened the Scriptures to them and taught them from the Scriptures about himself. That evening in the upper room, where ten of the disciples were gathered together, Jesus suddenly stood in their midst and showed himself alive to them.

Now Peter was present. Jesus had said to go to Galilee, and there they would see him. I think that is referring to the intimate account which John gives us (in John 21:15-17), where on the beach of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus says to Peter, "Peter, do you love me?" Peter says, "You know I do, Lord." Again, "Peter, do you love me?" "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." And yet a third time, "Peter, do you love me?" And Peter cried, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Then Jesus gave him his commission: "Feed my sheep." He was to be a pastor, a shepherd to the flock of God, which Peter took as his lifelong work from that time on. This was why the angel sent that personal word to Peter, when he spoke to the women at the tomb.

Then we are told that one week later, still in Jerusalem, Jesus appeared to the eleven disciples, when Thomas the doubter was invited to touch him, feel the scars, and was convinced by that.

John gives us the scenes in Galilee that I mentioned, where Jesus prepared breakfast for the disciples on the beach. Paul tells us he appeared after that to more than five hundred people at one time, on a mountain in Galilee. Then, back in Bethany, Jesus appeared for the last time, and led his disciples from Bethany to the Mount of Olives. And from the top of that mountain, as they were talking together, they watched him ascend into the heavens and disappear behind a cloud, and they saw him no longer. The point that Mark makes here is that these women believed, though they did not see.

How wonderful to have been able to see the risen Lord! All those who did so were regarded after that with unusual respect and awe in the

Christian community. But not all were privileged to do that. When Jesus appeared to Thomas the doubter, and invited him to feel the wounds in his hands and side, he said to him, "Thomas, because you have seen, you believe; but blessed are those who have not seen, and yet believe," John 20:28). In these words he was looking down through the course of the ages since, and including us all when he said "Blessed are those who, having not seen, yet believe." Peter writes something similar:

Without having seen him you love him; though you do not now see him you believe in him and rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy. (1 Peter 1:8 RSV)

That has been the experience of thousands, even millions, from that day on. That is where we are today. We have not seen the risen Lord He left the realm of the visibilities of earth many centuries ago. But we have the testimony. We have this evidence -- these many infallible proofs of which Luke speaks, which are convincing to the intellect and encouraging to the emotions, to awaken hope within us, as these women found their hope awakened by the word of the angel.

This brings us to the final point: if there is an invitation to this risen Lord to enter into your life and heart, you too will know him, feel him, have him present in your life. The question this brings before us at the close of this Easter message is, where are you? Have you learned to worship the risen Lord? Have you found him to come into your heart and life and change you? That is what makes life different. That is what puts joy in a heart and a smile on a face. That is what makes Christianity really Christianity. It is but an empty ritual, mere religious dogma, without the experience of a living, risen Lord.

I want to share with you an account which reached me this week from a friend of mine, Jay Kessler, president of Youth for Christ, International. He said,

I've never seen a clearer example of the miracle of God's resurrection power than in the life of

Lonnie Chapman. When Lonnie was a child, he stole from the grocery store because his parents refused to give him food. He was beaten, locked up, and cursed by his alcoholic father. When he was twelve, he watched his father rape his ten-year-old sister. Once his father tried to kill him with a piece of timber. Once his father punished him by breaking his fingers with a brick. Lonnie survived. He dropped out of school, traveled around, and ended up in California, where he teamed up with a friend whose name was Galatiansen. Galatiansen helped him become a thief and a murderer. After nearly half a dozen filling station stickups, Galatiansen, Lonnie, and another teen robbed a California filling station. They kidnapped the attendant to keep him from calling the police. They drove him out into the country and tied him up with electrical cord. At that moment, Lonnie relates, Galatiansen went into an insane rage and yelled, "Kill him Lonnie, kill him!" According to Lonnie, he didn't want to do it. He fired the rifle at the ground below the victim's feet. Galatiansen screamed, "You didn't kill him, you didn't kill him!" Trembling, afraid for his own life, Lonnie walked up to the helpless victim and shot him. A rifle blast in the face and another in the lower back ended his life. Lonnie is in prison now, sentenced to a life term for first degree murder. I don't want to say Lonnie's tragedy happened only because Galatiansen influenced him, but the influence is there.

Later, sitting in prison, Lonnie met a different kind of friend -- Rod Burke, one of the Youth for Christ staff, who spoke to him through a radio broadcast. Lonnie wrote to Rod, and Rod quickly drove over to see him with a gift copy of the New Testament under his arm. Young teens, Christians, began to back up Rod's prison visits with fervent prayer. Lonnie read that New Testament from cover to cover. Today, in Lonnie's probation report, you'll find this curious and cautiously worded sentence: "From conversations with the defendant, and letters from several other sources, it appears that the defendant has, in fact, undergone the Christian conversion experience." What an enormous understatement! Even in his prison cell you can see that Lonnie is an utterly transformed young man. He has inner peace. He is forgiven. He is

without bitterness. He knows that he may spend the rest of his days in prison, and yet he has found meaning and purpose in his life. He witnesses before his fellow prisoners. He has given New Testaments to all his cell mates. He writes letters to people he believes he can help. Ask him, and he'll tell you that he has been born anew to a living hope, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And it's enough. It's all he needs, even in a prison cell.

I am sure we could probably match that testimony right here in this congregation, perhaps a dozen times over. Those of you who were here at the Good Friday service know that two or three of those who shared their witness said that just last Easter they came to know the Lord Jesus right here in an Easter service, when they understood this tremendous rumor of hope that the women began there in Jerusalem: Jesus is alive. Jesus is available. Jesus will do what he says. He will fulfill his promise. And this is his promise:

He said, "If anyone hears my voice, and opens the door [the door of your heart], I will enter into him and live with him, and he with me," (Revelation 3:20). That is his promise, and he does what he says he will do. Millions today are finding out this great fact -- that he can change a life and, despite the circumstances, even if they are bleak and despairing, he can fill the heart with joy and peace and glory, and make you over again.

As we bring this service to a close, we who meet here week after week hope and pray that this will be your experience today. Perhaps some of you have never really known what the Easter message means. It is addressed to you, that you might find the peace and joy and forgiveness and hope that a living Lord Jesus, living with you in your life and heart, can bring to your life. We invite you, as we close in prayer, that you might in your own heart be saying, "Lord Jesus, come into my life." Open the door to him, say, "Come in, fill me, take me." You may have been religious, you may have been raised in a Christian home, and still have not found the living Lord. His presence is

what makes the difference between death and life, darkness and light.

**Prayer:**

Lord Jesus, we thank you that you are, indeed, what you promised to be -- a living Lord, a God who is omnipotent, strong, powerful, compassionate, tender, merciful, gracious, enduring -- and that you can enter our lives and begin to "pick up all the threads of our despair, and knit together the raveled sleeve of care", and bring us out of darkness into light, out of despair into hope, and out of death into resurrection. We pray that many, right now, in the quietness of their own hearts, may be praying to you, asking you to do what you promised to do in their lives, that they too may be born again unto a living hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. We thank you in your name, Amen.

## **Lesson 9 – Those Signs Following** **Mark 16 : 9-20**

### **Day 1 – Review**

1. What challenged or encouraged you from the lecture, and how did it help you in your Christian walk?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What in the notes helped you to understand God's Word, and how did you apply it?

### **Day 2 – Read Mark 16:9-11**

*Please pray before beginning your lesson. Possible verses to pray are based on Ephesians 1:18-22. Lord, I pray that the eyes of my heart may be enlightened to know the glorious inheritance I have in You and the incomparably great power working in me because I believe.*

3. When did Jesus rise?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. Who did Jesus appear to first?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. **Thought Question:** Why do you think Jesus chose to appear first to Mary Magdalene?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
6. What did Mary do immediately after her personal encounter with Jesus?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
7. When those who had been with Him heard from Mary about her personal experience and testimony about Jesus, how did they respond?

8. **Personal Question:** How do you respond to others when they share about a personal encounter they have had with Jesus? Do you respond with doubt, unbelief, or a critical spirit OR do you respond with excitement, wonder, and a spirit that desires to learn and grow?

***Apply this day:*** Pray and ask God to enable you to put time alone with Him as a priority in your life that you might have a personal encounter with Him today and every day. Thank Him in advance for the ways He's going to reveal Himself to you and listen and watch for Him with expectancy and excitement.

### **Day 3 – Read Mark 16:12-14**

*Please pray before beginning your lesson*

9. Describe what happens in Mark 16:12-13.

10. Mark does not describe the details of this encounter with Jesus, but we learn more about it in Luke's gospel. Read Luke 24:13-32. What did Jesus ask in Luke 24:17

11. Summarize their answer in Luke 24:19-24.

12. How does Jesus respond to these two in Luke 24:25 and then later to the eleven in Mark 16:14?

13. **Thought Question:** Jesus rebuked His followers for their unbelief, and in particular, their stubborn refusal to believe the testimonies of those to whom He had appeared. Why do you think it's so important to Jesus that we believe the testimonies in His Word of those who've been with Jesus and of His prophets? See John 20:26-31 to help you with your answer.

14. **Personal Question:** In Mark 5:36, Jesus declares “Do not fear, only *believe*.” And in John 6:29, He declares, “This is the work of God, that you *believe* in Him whom He has sent.” How’s your heart when it comes to believing? If you are “slow of heart to believe,” what might be preventing you from believing? What does Mark 9:23-24 encourage you to do when you struggle with unbelief?

**Apply this day:** *When we’re worrying, doubting, and fretting, we’re essentially refusing to believe Jesus and His promises. Pray right now, confessing any sin of unbelief and asking the Lord to enable you to trust Him and His Word over your fears and feelings. He is able!*

### **Day 4 – Read Mark 16:15-18**

*Please pray before beginning your lesson.*

15. **Thought Question:** What does Jesus tell His disciples to go and proclaim to all creation? What is the Gospel? (See I Cor.15:3-5 and Ephesian 2:4-5)

16. According to verse 16, who does Jesus say will be saved when they hear the Gospel (or Good News)?

17. How do the following verses help you understand the importance of believing God’s Word?

Hebrews 11:1,6-

John 6:40-

Hebrews 4:1-3

18. *Note: Most biblical scholars agree that the signs Jesus speaks of here refer primarily to signs that would occur during the days of the apostles and the early church. These would be authenticating signs accompanying their preaching that would further demonstrate the truthfulness and power of the Gospel to an unbelieving world.*

According to Mark 16:17-18, what signs does Jesus say would accompany His apostles and those who believe?

19. These dramatic signs obviously remind us of God's incredible, supernatural power and of His ability to protect and care for His own. In light of that power and provision, we surely should not give in to our fears. How do 1 John 4:4 and Matthew 28:18-20 help you to rest in His authority and power? How do these verses encourage you when sharing the good news with others?

***Apply this day:*** *None of us—this side of heaven—can fully understand the greatness of our God and His infinite power available to us when we believe in Him and trust in His promises...but we can make a start! Read Proverbs 3:5-6 and make it your prayer today—Father, today I will trust You all my heart and will not lean on my own understanding, but I will acknowledge You in all my ways, knowing and trusting that You will make my paths straight. In Jesus' mighty name, Amen.*

### **Day 5 – Read Mark 16:19-20**

*Please pray before beginning your lesson.*

20. According to these verses, what happened to Jesus after He spoke to the disciples?

21. Where is Jesus now sitting and what is He constantly doing according to—

Mark 16:19-

Romans 8:34

Hebrews 7:24-25-

22. **Personal Question:** We often praise Jesus for dying on the cross to save us from our sins, but how often do we thank and praise Him for constantly interceding for us? Hebrews says “He *always lives* to make intercession” for us—what a beautiful promise! How does it change your perspective when you’re going through difficulties to know that your Savior is interceding for you every moment of every day and night?

23. As the disciples went out to preach everywhere, what did the Lord do for them?

24. **Thought Question:** Based on verse 20, the Lord didn’t wait until the disciples knew everything and could do everything before sending them out. Instead, Jesus was with them and was constantly working with them along the way. How does this encourage you today? Do you think God expects us to know everything about Him and to understand His ways perfectly before He will use us? See Isaiah 55:8-9 for help with your answer.

25. On the other hand, who is the One who is perfect on our behalf according to Hebrews 12:2? What will He perfect for us?

**Apply this day:** *Jesus does it all! He redeems us, forgives us, sustains us, strengthens us, empowers us, equips us, intercedes for us, and perfects us and our faith. Today praise and thank Him for all He is, all He does, all He promises, and all He will finish and perfect. Consider daily praying this prayer of John Piper: “O Lord, thank you for my faith. Sustain it. Strengthen it. Deepen it. Don’t let it fail. Make it the power of my life, so that in everything I do, you get the glory as the great Giver. Amen.”*

**Day 6 – Reread Mark 16:9-11 (SOAP)**

*Please pray before beginning your lesson.*

**Scripture** – *Write the verse(s).*

**Observation** – *Record something you learned from these verses. Possible questions to ask for observation: What principle do I learn? What warning should I heed? What commandment should I obey? What aspect of God’s character do I see?*

**Application** – *How can I apply these verses to my life?*

**Prayer** – *Pray to God, praise Him, and ask Him for what you need in response to what you learned. Write down your prayer.*

## LESSON 9

# Those Signs Following

By Ray Stedman

I suppose one of the most controversial movements in the church today is that called the charismatic movement. I do not like to use the word use the word "charismatic" for a movement that stresses just one or two gifts of the Spirit, for all the gifts of the Spirit are charismatic. In First Corinthians 12 the apostle clearly says that every Christian has one or more charismatic gifts. I would prefer to call this group we are observing in the church now the Pentecostal movement, or, perhaps even more accurately, the glossolalia movement. The term glossolalia comes from the Greek (glossa, the tongue, and lalia, to speak) and is the more accurate term for this group because it stresses speaking in tongues. This movement relies heavily upon the closing verses of Mark's gospel for biblical support of its views. These verses refer to the signs that accompany those who believe: casting out demons, speaking in new tongues, healing the sick, picking up serpents, drinking poison, etc. We want to examine this passage very carefully.

First, however, I want to remind you that last Easter I preached on the resurrection passage from Mark 16:1-8, so that passage has already been taught. We are picking up at Mark 16:9-20, which concludes the chapter.

In some versions, particularly the RSV, you find these verses in a footnote at the bottom of the page. That is because many scholars are in doubt as to whether these verses actually belong to the gospel of Mark. It is true that the best of the Greek manuscripts do not contain these twelve verses, but it is also true that the overwhelming majority of the Greek manuscripts that we have today do contain these verses. And it is also true that two of the earliest church fathers, writing from the beginning of the second century, quote from this passage. So

it is clear that, from the very beginning, the church has accepted these twelve verses as accurate, even though they may not have come from the hand of Mark.

In this passage you will note one immediate change from the rest of the gospel: it is not in narrative form. Up to this point, Mark has been narrating in sequence the events as they happened to Jesus, bringing us right up to these stirring events of the crucifixion and resurrection. This last section, however, does not narrate events. It summarizes in brief order the events that occurred over a period of about forty days, and that change to summary form does indicate that perhaps it was written by a person other than Mark.

The key to this passage is the word "believe." That emphasis is in line with the thrust of Mark's gospel because this gospel does not present Christianity as just a nice story, a fascinating account of events that took place in the first century. It stresses the fact that the death and resurrection of Christ is something to be believed, and it is intended to change lives. As we act on our belief, it changes us. The emphasis here is on the belief of these apostles whom Jesus was to send out into all the world with this great story.

If you want a simple division of the passage, the first verses, 9-14, deal with the basis of apostolic belief; verses 15 and 16 deal with the apostolic preaching; and the rest of the passage, Verses 16-20, deal with the confirmation of the apostolic witness. Let's turn to Verses 9-14 and examine the basis of apostolic belief:

Now when he rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons. She went and told those who had been with him, as

they mourned and wept. But when they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they would not believe it. (Mark 16:9-11 RSV)

Immediately, the writer underscores the fact that these disciples, when they heard of Mary's experience with Jesus, did not believe it. You remember how the women had come to the tomb early in the morning, at the first light of dawn, and found the stone rolled away and saw the angel. The angel told them what had happened. "He is risen, as he said." But they did not see Jesus then. Mary Magdalene, according to John's account, was ahead of the others and, seeing the empty tomb, she ran to tell Peter and John immediately. Evidently she did not hear the angel's explanation. Peter and John both ran to the tomb. Peter went inside and saw the grave clothes lying there still wrapped as though they were around a body, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head was folded and placed aside. This convinced Peter and John that indeed Jesus was risen, but they still had not seen him. Mary Magdalene returned more slowly to the tomb and, John tells us, as she stood weeping in the garden and saw what she thought was the gardener, she asked him where they had laid the body of Jesus. He spoke her name and she knew it was Jesus; holding him by the feet, she worshipped him. This was the first appearance of the risen Lord to a disciple. He came first, as Mark tells us, to Mary Magdalene. She ran and told the other disciples. But Mark tells us that when Mary told them that Jesus was alive and that she had actually seen him, they would not believe it.

In Verse 12, Jesus appears to two disciples.

After this he appeared in another form to two of them, as they were walking into the country. And they went back and told the rest, but they did not believe them. (Mark 16:12-13 RSV)

Here we have the account Luke gives of the two disciples who were walking some eleven miles to the little village of Emmaus. Jesus appeared in "another form," Mark explains, and they did not know him. This was an extended conversation. As they walked along he began with Moses and the prophets and showed them

all the things that referred to Messiah. But as they sat at table with him and saw his hands as he broke bread, they recognized their crucified Lord. Then he disappeared.

These two disciples came back to Jerusalem immediately and told the eleven what they had seen, but, in Verse 14, Mark says the eleven did not believe them.

Afterward he appeared to the eleven themselves as they sat at table; and he upbraided them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen. (Mark 16:14 RSV)

It is evident that Mark wants us to understand what a climate of persistent and stubborn unbelief prevailed among these disciples after the resurrection. They found it difficult to accept this amazing fact, that the one they had seen crucified was now risen and living among them again. The significant thing here is that Jesus himself expected the eleven to believe before they saw him. He wanted and expected them to believe the reports of the eyewitnesses who had seen him. They were trustworthy persons and were reporting what they themselves had actually experienced, and that should have been enough to convince these disciples that Jesus was risen from the dead. So concerned is he about this that he rebukes them. Even as he did in the days of his flesh, so now, he, as their living, risen Lord, rebukes them for their unbelief. He takes them to task because they refused to believe those who had seen him. You can see the importance he attributes to this matter of believing eyewitnesses. John's gospel tells us that a week later Jesus appeared to them when Thomas, who had not been with them when he appeared the first time, was present. Jesus invited Thomas to examine him, to put his hand on his side and touch the nail prints in his hands and feet. Thomas did so and fell down at his feet, crying, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28b RSV). Jesus said, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe," (John 20:29 RSV). Years later, when Peter is writing his letters to the Christians he says to them (1 Peter 1:8), "Without having seen him you love him;

though you do, not now see him you believe in him and rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy."

One thing is very clear from this account in Mark. When we have adequate, trustworthy witnesses who report to us what they have seen, we are expected to respond with belief. These men saw the risen Lord. They were granted a privilege that we are not granted; but nevertheless, our faith can rest upon solid foundation. Even though we have not seen him, we believe because of the eyewitness accounts here. Now remember the disciples' struggle to believe in the resurrection because that is the climate in which the rest of this passage dealing with the "signs following" is given. After rebuking the disciples for their unbelief, Jesus gives them a command in Verse 15:

And he said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned."  
(Mark 16:15-16 RSV)

Amazingly, the translators of this passage have always handled it as though Jesus were emphasizing the word "go." That is not the central command he gave to these disciples. In both Matthew and Mark, where we have the great commission, what we should emphasize is "preach," for this is the command. It should read like this: "As you go into all the world (that is taken for granted), preach the good news to the whole creation." Our Lord takes it for granted that, as the church grows and develops, the good news will spread throughout all the world. It is right that we should think about how to reach out to the world. I am not diminishing the emphasis on missions at all. But I want to point out that the instruction our Lord gives is that while we are going, we are to preach, to tell the good news.

Now the good news, clearly, is the death and resurrection of Jesus himself. Nothing can be clearer than that. The good news is not that Jesus came to earth; the good news is that he died and rose again. The implications of those

events and what they mean to us -- that is the good news! For, in the death of Jesus you have the solution of the terrible problem of human evil, the force that grips us and destroys all our good intentions. That force is finally destroyed, vitiated, by the death of Jesus. The implication of the resurrection is that Jesus himself, the same Jesus that lived and talked and manifested his life and power on the hills of Judea and Galilee, that same Jesus now lives within us and is available to us. He will live again that same life, in terms of our circumstances, right where we are.

Now that is the incredible good news of the gospel. There is no mention of the fact that when you die you will go to heaven. That is part of the good news. I do not want to have a misunderstanding here. But, almost invariably, heaven is what people think you are talking about when you mention the good news. They think it is some way to get past death. Heaven is not the good news; it is but a result of the good news. The good news is that the power of evil in your life and mine can be broken! It no longer grips us and ruins everything we try to do. It is broken by the power of the resurrection of Jesus. The living Lord himself lives within us and imparts to us power to act. This is the good news, and this is what we ought to be telling abroad.

Last week at the Family Congress in St. Louis, Missouri, most of the speakers talked about the release and deliverance that comes as a family begins to experience the power of a risen Lord. But some speakers were very unclear on this and garbled it terribly. One woman, addressing the congress, said that, as the early Christians gathered around Jesus, he taught them how to love one another. Then, she said, the disciples began to teach others how to love, and thus the Christian cause spread throughout the world, teaching people how to be a loving community. There was no mention whatsoever of the death and resurrection of Jesus. Now that is pure hogwash. Christianity without the death and resurrection of Jesus is pabulum that is handed out to people as a kind of moral teaching which is impossible for them to follow. Therefore, it is useless.

Mark Twain used to say, "It isn't the parts of the Bible I can't understand that bother me; it's the parts I do understand." Men do not need to be told what to do. What they need is to be changed, to be altered at the very depths of their being so that they can do what they already know is right.

That is what Scripture calls *salvation*. That is why Jesus said, "He who believes (this good news) and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned."

Now there are some who quibble over the word "baptism." There are groups today that take this word, press it to an unwarranted extreme, and say it is necessary not only to believe but also to be baptized. They say that if you believe and are not baptized, you will never be saved. Such an extreme is, of course, totally unsupported by the rest of Scripture. What Jesus means is that belief ought to be real, and the reality of that inward belief is demonstrated by the outward action of baptism. Only that belief that changes us and makes us act is real belief, and the way that we can demonstrate it is by being baptized. But that does not add to what the belief itself has already accomplished; it only demonstrates it. If you cannot be baptized, that does not affect salvation at all. God knows and reads the heart. But ordinarily, belief is to be translated into action by this ritual which is designed to express faith in Jesus Christ, and says, in very eloquent terms, that you have been put down into death and risen again to walk with him in newness of life.

Now I have found people who dislike this word "saved" because it makes them feel uncomfortable. Well, I understand that. There have been times when I have felt uncomfortable when people used this term. To have somebody rush up to you, grab you by the lapels, and say, "Brother, are you saved?" always turns me off. It is not so much the term as the way it is used that turns people off. But I think it is clear that those who struggle with this word have never really understood the hopelessness of humanity. Once you begin to see how absolutely helpless you are to change your pattern of life, to be

acceptable to God apart from the work of Jesus Christ, you will understand what "saved" means. And when it happens to you, you will know that this is the only possible word that could have been used -- that mankind indeed is like a drowning man, hopeless and helpless, unless somebody rescues him. As someone has well put it,

Your best resolutions must wholly be waived,  
Your highest ambitions be crossed;

You need never think that you'll ever be saved,  
Until you've learned that you're lost.

When you come to the place of learning how helpless you are, then this word of release comes in with mighty, thrilling, hope-giving power: "Believe and be saved."

Now just because salvation reduces man to having nothing to offer God, we struggle with it. We do not like that. Therefore it is frequently resisted and attacked and ridiculed. This will be especially true of the resurrection of Jesus, upon which our faith rests. No part of Christianity ever has been subjected to more severe ridicule, more clever attack, than the resurrection. In every generation it is under attack because, as Paul put it, "If Jesus Christ be not risen from the dead, then our faith is in vain," 1 Corinthians 15:7). And so, as the keystone of Christianity, the resurrection is under severe attack. In every generation attempts are made to try and explain it in natural terms.

Knowing the pressure that would be brought against these apostles to get them to deny this supernatural event, our Lord now goes on to give them certain signs which will accompany and encourage them in preaching the gospel. This climate of unbelief is the setting in which Jesus promises these signs in Verse 17,

"And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; If they pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on

the sick, and they will recover." (Mark 16:17-18 RSV)

It is easy to read this as though Jesus means these signs will accompany everyone who believes and preaches the gospel. Unfortunately, the text makes it appear this way, and this is how this passage has been understood by many. As you go about preaching the gospel, these signs will immediately confirm that the faith of those who believe is genuine. But the amazing fact is that for twenty centuries millions of people have been converted and have believed the gospel, and none of these signs have appeared.

There have been claims that these signs have been manifested in certain instances, but if this is what these words meant, then these signs would be everywhere. Every time a person became a Christian, some of these signs would be manifested. Therefore, they ought to be the most frequent occurrence in all Christendom. But the truth is, they are very rarely, if ever, seen.

Now what does this mean? Well, it means, of course, that we have misunderstood this passage if we read it that way. It does not square with what God actually does.

I think there is a rather simple solution to the problem. If we put the passage back in its context, in terms of the climate of unbelief which prevailed among these disciples as the word about the resurrection was brought to them, then we see that Jesus is addressing these words not to those who believe the gospel, but to these disciples who believed or disbelieved in his resurrection. When he says to them, "These signs will accompany those who believe," he is speaking about the disciples. I think we can even insert these words, "those among you who believe," without doing violence to the text. Jesus is saying to these disciples, "Now go and preach in all creation. And to encourage you, in the face of the hostility you will encounter, certain signs that only God could do will accompany you." They would be given power to deliver from demons, power to set free from

demonic influence. They would be given power to praise God in a new language.

"New tongues" is speaking in a language that hasn't been learned. The disciples would be given this ability as a means of praising God. Paul himself tells us in First Corinthians 12, that he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to man. I do not know why it is so hard for us to accept that fact. Everywhere people consider tongues as a means of speaking to men, of preaching the gospel, or of conveying messages or prophesying events. And yet Paul says he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men, but to God. He goes on to make clear that speaking in tongues is an act of praise and thanksgiving unto God for his magnificent works among men, as a sign to unbelievers. You remember these two things are underscored very strongly in Paul's great treatment of this in First Corinthians 14. "New tongues" is not spoken to men; it is spoken to God. And it is not for believers; it is a sign for unbelievers. Thus these disciples were sent out with this sign. I do not think this sign was limited to the apostles; others received the gift as well.

Further, the disciples would have power to survive physical attacks upon their lives. Bitten by a poisonous serpent, they would not die. If they accidentally drank poison, they would not die. They would have power to survive, that the gospel might go out. This would be one of the authenticating signs given to them.

Now you can see this has nothing to do with the practices of certain Kentucky mountain people who handle rattlesnakes and drink strychnine as evidence of their faith. Actually, if you investigate those practices, you will find that this really is affirming a lack of faith on their part, for periodically, one or more of them die as a result of having been bitten by a rattlesnake, or by drinking poison. This is not what the gospel is talking about.

The fourth sign is power to heal, to lay hands upon the sick, and they will recover. This was to be the invariable rule; there was to be no percentage on this. The disciples would lay hands on the sick and 100% of those who had

hands laid on them would recover. Again, you can see what a far cry this is from what we are seeing today in "healing services" that claim to fulfill this.

Now the Apostle Paul did all these things. He cast our demons in the name of the Lord Jesus. He spoke in new tongues more than them all, he said, as praise and thanksgiving to God. I think he did it in the synagogue; it was not a private practice of his at home. When he was accidentally bitten by a poisonous snake, as recorded in the last chapter of Acts, he shook it off into the fire, unharmed, to the amazement of those who watched. He had power to lay hands on the sick, and they were healed; and he did it again and again. This is what he means when he writes in Second Corinthians 12:12: "The signs of a true apostle were performed among you in all patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works."

These, then, are the signs of an apostle. They were authenticating signs to accompany those who first went out with the gospel into an unbelieving and hostile world. We have this confirmed, I think, by the final paragraph.

So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God. And they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them [the disciples] and confirmed the message by the signs that attended it. (Mark 16:19-20 RSV)

Thus the authentication was given to their ministry, and encouragement to their faith. We have another reference to this in the letter to the Hebrews where, in Chapter 2, the writer reminds us,

...how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard him, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his own will. (Hebrews 2:3-4 RSV)

So Mark closes this gospel of his with the Lord in heaven -- not far off in space somewhere, but in the invisible dimensions of life right here among us, living as Lord in the midst of his church, directing its events, planning its strategy, carrying it unto the farthest reaches of the world. And the apostles, scattered throughout the known world of that day, preached this good news, their witness being confirmed by these great signs. They thus laid the foundation of the great building that Paul calls the church, the body of Christ, that has grown through all the centuries since. Remember how, in Ephesians 2, Paul says that the foundation was laid by the apostles and the prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief cornerstone, upon which the whole building grows (and has grown now for these twenty centuries) into a habitation of God through the Spirit. That foundation was laid by these apostles, who speak to us the truth about Jesus.

When you hear all these claims about Jesus today, are you ever tempted to say, as I am, "Will the real Jesus please stand up?" He does in these Scriptures. The real Jesus is the apostolic Jesus, the one the apostles witnessed. And that witness is underscored and confirmed by these signs which accompanied them in their ministry, so that we would know that what they say is the truth.

May God grant that our work will rest upon this great foundation that has already been laid, and which no man can re-lay. May we proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ, alive, vital, ready to live within men and women and set us free, change our lives, lead us into liberty and freedom, for that is what the gospel is all about.

**Prayer:**

Thank you, our heavenly Father, for the good, good news that Jesus Christ is not dead but alive, and that he lives within our hearts and has

the power to break the chains of sin, the bondage of evil, in our lives. Thank you, Father, for the changes that come as a result, the differences that he makes as he comes into human hearts. And thank you for these apostles, these mighty men who faithfully preached this great truth against much persecution and ridicule, and who clearly and accurately conveyed to us the facts upon which our faith rests. We pray that we may be faithful like them, and rest our faith upon this unchanging witness. We ask in Jesus' name, Amen.