



Mark 16:1-8 - 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. ²Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb ³and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?" ⁴But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. ⁵As 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. ⁷But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.' " ⁸Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

Christ is risen – no fooling!



Shouts of joy and victory resound in the tents of the righteous: "The LORD's right hand has done mighty things! The LORD's right hand is lifted high; the LORD's right hand has done mighty things! I will not die but live, and will proclaim what the LORD has done.

(Psalm 118:15-17)

Sidd Finch, ever heard of him? He was featured in the April 1985 edition of Sports Illustrated magazine. He was a baseball player, a pitcher, in training with the New York Mets. His story was quite fascinating. He was raised in an orphanage in England and then later adopted by a famous archaeologist. Sidd Finch went to Harvard University for a spell, but eventually found his place in the world in the mountains of Tibet where he became a master of yoga, which apparently helps you harness ultimate control of your mind and body. According to the article, even though Sidd had never played a game of organized baseball in his life, this yoga induced mind/body control allowed him to do something very special – in fact, unheard of. He could throw a fastball at the blistering speed of 168 mph (crushing the former record of 104 mph), with pinpoint accuracy and no need to warm up. Mets fans were ecstatic that their team had stumbled upon the greatest pitching prospect of all time, but unfortunately for them, Sidd Finch never ascended the mound at Shea Stadium, or anywhere else for that matter. The reason for that is actually written in the article itself. In the headline subtitle is this sentence about Sidd: *"He's a pitcher, part yogi and part recluse. Impressively liberated from our opulent lifestyle, Sidd's deciding about yoga – and his future in baseball."* Did you catch it? If you take the first letter from each word, it spells, "Happy April Fools Day." That article about Sidd appeared on April 1, 1985. It might seem obvious now, thirty-three years removed from the article, but shouldn't Mets fans have been at least a little incredulous about a 168 mph fast ball? I mean come on...a guy who could throw this kind of heat would make hall of famer Nolan Ryan look like a pee-wee pitcher! But that's how it goes sometimes – people get so excited about the prospect of what could be and what it could mean for them, that they just can't help but believe it.

Since today is April 1 (April Fool's Day), how about this one? The eternal Son of God took on human flesh to live life under his Father's law, and do it perfectly in our place; only to be executed like a common criminal, hanging on a cross. *This is God?! But the story doesn't end there. Three days later, he rose from the dead – and promises forgiveness of sins and eternal life in heaven. Sounds pretty unbelievable, doesn't it? Is this just another example of a great hoax of history that hopeless people need to use as a crutch to get through life? They pin their hopes on something that can't possibly be true, and so delude themselves with the sheer power of positivity and promise. Is that what's going on here? Is the message of Christ crucified and risen just a nice thought for Sunday school kids and little old ladies, but for us "thinking folks," it's even more impossible than a 168 mph fastball? At the beginning of the service, you joined your hearts and voices with the historic Christian church and echoed the simplest and yet most profound acclamation of all, *Christ is risen, he is risen indeed!* But how do you know? Have you seen him? Have you touched his hands and side? How do you know? Because this is the testimony of the gospel. This is the word of God, who cannot lie. This is no hoax for the hopeless; this is the power and promise of the Almighty.*

Listen to St. Mark's account of the resurrection, **When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome brought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?" But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed. "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.**



In their early morning march to the tomb, those women were weighed down by the myrrh and spices they were carrying, but they shouldered an even heavier burden in their hearts. This man, Jesus was unlike any other, and now he was gone. The least they could do was to give him a proper burial. But when those women arrived at the tomb, things were nothing like they expected. The huge stone they worried about so much had been flung aside like it was nothing. The stone slab that should've borne a corpse was empty – except it wasn't. An angel messenger preached the first Easter sermon to those frightened women. That seven word sermon has literally changed the history of the world. **“He has risen! He is not here.”** Whether the world believes in the bodily resurrection of Christ from the dead doesn't change the fact in the least: Easter truly, literally happened – no fooling!

So what does that mean for you? The Apostle Paul explored that question in our lesson from 1 Corinthians 15, **If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.** If Christ has not been raised, you are hopeless. You're still in your sins, you have no hope for all your loved ones who have fallen asleep in the faith, and your entire existence on this earth is a slow, steady march until one day until you finally wind up at the funeral parlor. If Christ has not been raised, you and I and every person on this planet have no hope. But Christ is risen – no fooling! Truly, literally, physically raised from death to life again. If Christ had not been raised, you and I only live to die. Since Christ has been raised, you and I die to live! Trusting in the resurrection isn't a matter of, *I didn't like all that depressing stuff about hopelessness and death – so I'm going to pin my hopes on something more positive.* This is no hoax for the hopeless – by a miracle of the Holy Spirit, trusting in the resurrection of Christ is taking God, who cannot lie, at his word. Through the resurrection of Christ, you have assurance, not just for tomorrow, but forever in heaven – no fooling!

And do we need it! In a world that prides itself on no absolute truth, and even in a religious climate that will tell you to do your part and God might do his – the message of the resurrection brings a comfort and assurance unlike any other. The old, sinful nature inside each of us is always trying to shoehorn its way into the equation of our salvation – as if some tiny bit of credit comes to me because of the supposed right choice I've made, or some assurance is to be taken from a glance inside myself instead of away from myself and to the cross and empty tomb. It happens easily today, as it always has, that people will tie strings onto God's gift of salvation in Christ. But rather than let us wrestle with a monster of uncertainty about where we stand, the resurrection of Christ makes an unequivocal, categorical promise about your status with a holy God. **Christ was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification. Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.** Through the resurrection of Christ, you have peace with God. There is no sin on your record; there's only Jesus on your side – no fooling!

But sometimes it doesn't feel like it, does it? I hear the promise and proclamation of forgiveness for my sins, but sometimes my own personal feelings of guilt overwhelm me to the point that I can't even look past my feelings of worthlessness to see the living breathing proof of God's grace standing right in front of me. I hear what you're saying about the promise of resurrection for me and those who die in the faith, but it doesn't seem to look like it when it's my sister, my grandma, my nephew they're lowering six feet into the ground. I see what you're getting at when you say that Christ's resurrection gives my life meaning and purpose even today, but I'm so defeated so often. Every single day, I struggle to be what God has declared me to be in Christ. Have you ever felt like that? Like your sin was too great for God's grace; like your death was too final for Christ's resurrecting Word; like your situation was so far gone that you're beyond God's loving reach? If you have (and if we're honest with ourselves, I think we all have) you're not alone. The promise of Easter is universal, but it's also personal.



One of Jesus' own disciples was feeling that way – Peter. So did you notice what the angel messenger said to the women at the tomb? **“Don’t be alarmed,” he said, “You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here...Go, tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee.’”** Can you imagine how Peter was feeling? A few days ago, within a matter of hours, he had gone from saying, **“Even if all fall away, I will not”** to **“I don’t know this man you’re talking about!”** Peter had denied his Lord, but his Lord hadn’t denied Peter. Instead, Peter was singled out for special comfort and assurance. It’s as if the risen Lord said through his angel messenger, *“Peter, you’re still mine.”* The promise of Easter is universal, but it’s also personal. You can insert your name into the angel’s words, and it rings with the beautiful truth of the gospel: *Go and tell everyone...and Matt that Christ has risen to pay even for his sins...even for yours.* Through the death and resurrection of Christ, your sins have been taken completely away – even yours – no fooling!

So what are you expecting to get out of your Easter celebration this year? I suppose that depends on what happened at that tomb on the outskirts of Jerusalem – is it hoax or is it history – and what you believe about the reality of Jesus’ resurrection. If the forgiveness of sins and victory over death aren’t really that big of a deal to you, then there is no compelling reason to come and worship Jesus again anytime soon. And the best you can expect from today is a bunny, bonnets, a nice ham, and a nap. But if Christ walked out of his tomb (and he did!) – truly, bodily, powerfully – then you have every reason to worship him as often as you can! And the certainty you have for today is full forgiveness for all of your sins, complete removal of all your guilt, God’s truth to drive out your doubts, joy as you live for Jesus now, hope of eternal life in heaven, and the assurance of your own bodily resurrection when the last trumpet sounds.

This April Fool’s Day, you might find some sugar in the salt shaker, or find a bogus article in Sports Illustrated, but you certainly won’t find Christ in his tomb. The resurrection really happened – no fooling. Through Christ, you have a home forever in heaven – no fooling. In him your sins have been forgiven, forgotten, forever - no fooling. Your death has been defeated – no fooling. For the believer, death is no longer the horrific period at the end of a life-long run on sentence. It’s a comma, leading into the eternal life that is already yours because of Christ. The resurrection guarantees the *“It is finished!”* that Christ spoke from the cross. Sin is covered, death is conquered, Satan is condemned – Christ is risen – no fooling!

Amen

To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy – to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.

(Jude 24-25)