**New Hope Global Sermon Easter 2021 - Obedience in the face of the impossible**

**Introduction**

There is a sentence in the gospel accounts of the resurrection that appears only in the Gospel of Mark. The Spirit brought it to my attention this week and I discover that it is very relevant for where most of us are in our faith walk this Easter 2021. To set the stage I want us to read the Matthew account of the resurrection in Mt. 28:1-7

Read it in our worship service in all the languages of those present.

Remember the context. In Mt. 27:57-60 we learn that Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, went to Pilate after Jesus had died and asked for Jesus’ body. “It was given to him. So he wrapped the body in a clean linen cloth and laid it in his own new tomb. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away.” Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there and saw where Jesus had been buried. In verses 62-66 of ch. 27 Matthew adds:

62The next day, the day after Preparation Day for Passover, the chief priests and the Pharisees went together to Pilate. 63They said to him, “Our master, we remember that this imposter claimed that he would rise from the dead after three days. 64So please, order the tomb to be sealed until after the third day. Seal it so that his disciples can’t come and steal the corpse and tell people he rose from the dead. Then the last deception would be worse than the first!”65“I will send soldiers to guard the tomb,” Pilate replied. “Go with them and make the tomb as secure as possible.” 66So they left and sealed the stone,[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mt.+27%3A62-66&version=TPT#fen-TPT-5668a)] and Pilate’s soldiers secured the tomb.”

At this point in the storyline, Michael Wilkins, the writer of the *NIV Application Commentary on Matthew* adds:

On at least one occasion Jesus had specifically predicted to the Pharisees that he would rise in three days (12:40). The Pharisees had not forgotten. . .So they approach Pilate and address him with deference: ‘Sir,. . .we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, ‘After three days I will rise again.” It is interesting that not even the disciples recall this prediction, probably because of their personal fear and grief. But these religious leaders are savvy. They have witnessed Jesus’ miraculous powers, and they want to make certain that whatever power is behind Jesus is not libeated. The cataclysmic events at the crucifixion , with the fearsome darkness, the tearing of the temple curtain and the earthquakes portend ominous powers. The Jewish religious leaders sense that things may get ouf of control so they enlist Pilate’s aid in keeping the tomb secure.” (Wilkins, *NIV Application commentary, Matthew*, Zondervan, 2004, p. 914).

Pilate granted their request and ordered the tomb sealed and the guards dispatched to the site. The women may not have known about this extra sealing of the tomb and the soldiers who were now guarding the tomb, because Luke’s account, Lk. 23:55-56, says “the women saw the tomb and how his body was laid. Then they returned [to their homes] and prepared spices and anointments. . . On the first day of the week at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared.”

So in this background we learn that:

* Jesus is buried right before the Sabbath in Joseph’s new tomb by Joseph and Nicodemus, themselves both Pharisees but now believers in Christ.
* The women saw where Jesus was buried.
* The Romans granted the Jewish religious leaders’ request to seal the tomb to make sure the disciples can’t come in and steal the body, and Pilate posts guards to deter such disciples’ actions.
* The women return home from the crucifixion and prepare the costly burial spices and anointing ointments for Jesus’ body.
* They head back to the tomb on the first day of the week after the Passover.

**The Question**

It’s at this point in the storyline when Mark’s question arises. We pick up Mark’s account in Mark 16:1-3: “When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so they could embalm him. Very early on Sunday morning, as the sun rose, they went to the tomb. They worried out loud to each other, “Who will roll back the stone from the tomb for us?” (The Message)

This is the question the Spirit focused on for us this year. And the women’s actions in the context of all the obstacles impressed me by their faith. From their perspective the women were in the midst of enormous grief. The Master they had been following had just been shamed, mocked, tortured and crucified before their eyes. All their hopes were shattered. Nothing was turning out as they had expected. Yet, in obedience to what they knew, it was right to anoint a person’s body for burial. So they had mixed the burial spices and expensive anointments, with their tears I presume, and headed out to the tomb to do what they felt was right. What would honor their Master even in his death.

And they acted out their faith and effort to honor Jesus even when they could not see how it was possible to fulfill their mission: “Who will roll away the stone from the tomb for us?” It was a practical sight-based question. The stones sealing expensive tombs like Joseph’s had to be massive and heavy. The women knew that. They had seen the stone rolled into place. And even with 3 of them, it would have been impossible for them to move the stone. Yete onward they came toward the tomb to do wht seems impossible.

Let me stop right there and move to obvious application before we return to wht God did.

How many times this year or in the recent past have you set out to do something that seemed impossible to accomplish because you felt God led you to do it? And how many times when you counted that cost and recognized the practical obstacles in front of you did you turn back and decide it was impossible?

When Jingjing and I were talking about this story this week, she reminded me of her life verse from Luke 1 that nothing is impossible with God.(Lk.1:37). That was the angel’s word to Mary after Gabriel had told Mary that she was chosen to be the birthmother of the Messiah – without having intercourse with a man. How is this possible? Mary had asked. “With God nothing is impossible came the reply and so the Holy Spirit brought about the conception of Jesus in Mary’s womb. Mary accepted that plan of God and praised God for His purposes fulfilled in history that would come with the birth of the Messiah. She acted on the faith she had – even when it seemed impossible.

Many of us at New Hope are facing, have been facing for some time, and clearly will continue to face impossible situations. The issue is what we do with the calling we have at that point. Do we succumb to a sight-based faith and turn back from the impossible because we can’t reason our way to a solution? Or do we go forward as the women did and believe that God will create a miracle to help us fulfill what He has put on our hearts to do.

You know what the women experienced next - There was a great earthquake as an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and rolled back the stone. When the women arrived at the tomb, their question was answered. The angel told them the good news of Christ’s resurrection, commissioned them to go tell the disciples and then Jesus Himself met them as they hurried to fulfill their new calling. I expect they left the spices and anointing ointments at the tombsite. These were no longer needed. Their Lord had risen.

This is the take-away God wants each of us to ponder and apply: where are we as a church and each of us individually to keep moving forward in obedience to God even when our task seems impossible? Will we expect to see God’s miraculous intervention? Will we ask God for this? Then when He shows Himself as our Mighty Father and all-powerful Lord, will we tell His story to all those we know? If the Lord has led us on His path, He will bring His calling in us to completion. Thanks be to God! Amen. Dr. M.L. Codman-Wilson, Pastor.