

Teach the congregation to sing, "Bury The Workmen" by Unspoken. (see bulletin insert)

By a show of hands how many of y'all have trouble sleeping at night? (**pause**) Maybe you keep having to get up to go to the bathroom. Maybe you need one of those CPAP machines, or you snore... Anybody have trouble getting enough sleep at night? (**pause and raise my hand**) I don't get enough sleep at night because we have this beautiful baby girl who will not sleep through the night. As a result I have been looking for ways to stay awake during the day. This past Tuesday morning I was having real trouble keeping my eyes open. So I headed over to Bojangles to write this morning's message. While I was there I started talking to this group of L.D.S. folks. They told me they don't celebrate Easter. They just have an Easter memorial. The Later Day Saints (LDS) folks do not believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. They were telling me about all of this when I had an, "Aha!" moment with regards to this morning's passage. According to Mark when the women looked into the tomb an angel told them; Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified has been raised. He is not here." "Go and tell His disciples and Peter that he going before you to Galilee; there you will see Him, as He told you" (16:6-7). The women were so amazed, and afraid that they ran from the tomb as fast as they could, and according to Mark's Gospel the women, "said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid" (v 8). From Mark's perspective the resurrection of Jesus Christ started off as the very best kept secret of salvation.

The story begins with Mary Magdalene, Mary the Mother of James and Salome. You see, Jesus had to be taken down from the cross very quickly because the day of rest, or Sabbath was upon them. Joseph of Aramathea took up his courage and asked the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, if he could take the body down and bury Jesus. Jesus was wrapped in a linen shroud and then laid in a freshly hewn stone tomb. Joseph of Aramathea did not anoint Jesus' body with oils and aloes because there was not time before the Sabbath. Mary, Mary and Salome followed Joseph. They saw where Jesus was buried. Then the day after the Sabbath the women went back to the tomb (15:42-16:1).

These women had ministered to Jesus when He was in Galilee (15:41). Now as a final act of devotion they came to minister to Jesus' body by properly by anointing His body with aloes and oil (16:1). The women were concerned with practical things like how would they move the heavy stone away from the front of tomb? What would they need to do to preserve Jesus' body. Apparently, they were not prepared for what they were about to see and hear.

The stone was rolled away. (**pause**) The stone was rolled away. (**pause**) Jesus was not in the tomb. (**pause**) Where was Jesus? Who had taken the body? Where have they laid him? (**pause**) All of these questions likely flashed through their minds. What was certain was Jesus was not in the tomb. Amen? **Amen.** Jesus was not in the tomb! Amen?! **Amen!** Praise the Lord, because Jesus was not in the tomb! Amen? **Amen.**

But the tomb was not empty. There was a young man inside the tomb sitting next to where Jesus' body had lain. He was probably waiting on the women to arrive. The young boy was probably an angel (or a messenger from God) with a message for these women.

"Do not be amazed; you seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has 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" (Mark 16:6-7)

Jesus is not in the tomb. Amen? **Amen.** Jesus is risen! Amen?! **Amen!** Jesus was arrested, falsely convicted, beaten, spat upon, made fun of, beaten again, caned, scourged, publicly exposed, rejected by his own people, forced to carry His cross for our sins, and then hung on that cross until dead. (**pause**) That is what it means to

be crucified. (pause) Jesus was rejected by His own people, and delivered up to be tortured to death by the very people occupying the Promised Land. (pause) Then; after all of that; the tomb was empty. The tomb had been sealed for three days with Jesus inside, and when the women arrived the tomb was empty. Praise the Lord, the tomb was empty. Amen? Amen.

Sisters and brothers Jesus was crucified to pay the price for your sins. Jesus was crucified to pay the price for my sins. Jesus was crucified to pay the price for the sins of every person inside and outside of these walls. Jesus died so that while we were still covered in the bright red stains of our terrible rebelliousness we could be made white as snow. Jesus did not wait for us to be perfect. God did not wait for us to get right according to the Law of Moses. Jesus died on the cross while we were still sinners. That proves God's love toward us. God loves us right where we are, and God loves us all enough not to leave us where we are. Amen? Amen! Jesus did not just die on the cross.

There is a program down in Stanly County called the Bridge to Recovery. Their mission is to help people coming out of detox for substance abuse get into a rehabilitation program. The reason they exist is because too many people come out of detox, sincerely wanting to get better, but because they cannot find placement in a rehab program they wind up living right back in the situation that put them in need of detox. Jesus did not die on the cross just so we could go to detox for our sins. Jesus Christ is the great bridge builder to a life free of the sins which have damaged our lives for so long. Jesus paid the price for our sins through justifying grace, and the Holy Spirit provides the means for us to leave behind the circumstances and habits which lead us to sin in the first place through God's sanctifying grace. My brothers and sisters this is the Gospel of how good it is to be loved by God. This is the kind of good news that should be too good to keep to ourselves. (pause) And yet for too many of us the Gospel is the best kept secret we keep to ourselves.

When the women heard the angel's message they were frightened. **"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 16:8). I am not going to ask for a show of hands, but I am willing to bet there too many people in this room who are afraid to share the good news of what God has done for them. We are eager to share when our football or basketball team plays a great game. We are eager to share when we have had a great meal, or seen a good show, or received a great haircut. (pause) But too often we keep the good news of Jesus Christ to ourselves. (pause) Why has the Gospel become our best kept secret? (pause) Why do we keep the best news – the news of how much God loves us to ourselves? (pause) Is it because we are afraid of what people will think? Is it because we are afraid of not being believed? Is it because we are afraid we will not have the correct words? (pause) My sisters and brothers, let me help you with this. The answer to all of these questions is simple and hard. The answer is honesty. The best way to destroy a secret is to be honest with what really happened. To be honest with what we know to be true. (pause) To be honest with what we don't understand. (pause) In my experience people don't want to know it all to tell them everything. (pause) People want someone who will be honest with them about what happened. People want someone who will honestly live out the change God has brought into their lives without judging others for their failures. We will fail along the way. I certainly have. However, if we are honest with ourselves and with others about the good God has done and where we have fallen short people will be open to hear what we have to say. People may even want to hear more about this wonderful good news of Jesus Christ. Brothers and sisters, honesty is how the workmen move the Gospel forward, and not by keeping it a secret.

In the name of Jesus Christ,
Amen.