

“Nothing But Empty!”

Mark 16:1-8

Pastor Art Scanson

You may have heard, astronomers have found a big empty place in the universe. This is a massive void. Nothing! This hole is gigantic, nearly a billion light-years across. Inside it there are no planets, no stars, no galaxies, no gases. It’s just a huge cold spot.

A whole lot of nothing.

It can stretch and even boggle your mind to think of the incredible distance between stars in the sky. You might be aware that a light-year is a unit of distance—it’s the distance that light can travel in one year. One light-year equals about six trillion miles. That is a long way!

So how far away are the stars in the sky? Our nearest neighbor is a star about four light-years away or twenty-five trillion miles.

Now back to that empty space. It’s between 6 and 10 billion light-years away from us, and it’s nearly a billion light-years across. I don’t know about you but that is beyond my thinking other than to say that is gigantic, humongous!

Just think - an empty space. The empty tomb. The Easter tomb is empty, void, but is a massive, world-changing reality. It speaks of a gigantic, humongous event. (Homiletics, April 2009, p53)

Let us turn to our scripture lesson for today. Read Mark 16:1-8
p.1221.

Max Lucado tells the story of a physician in Arkansas who mis-diagnosed a patient. He declared the woman to be dead. The family was informed, and the husband was grief-stricken.

Now, imagine the surprise of the nurse when she discovered that the woman was not dead, but alive! “You better tell the family,” she urged the doctor.

The embarrassed physician phoned the husband and said, “I need to talk to you about the condition of your wife.”

“The condition of my wife?” he asked. “She’s dead.”

“Well,” the doctor mumbled with embarrassment, “she’s seen a slight improvement.”

Yah! A slight improvement? Talk about an understatement! However, there is one exception - it took place at a tomb just outside Jerusalem. The sabbath had passed. Mary Magdalene and two other women were on their way to the tomb of a friend with spices that they might anoint the body. Their friend had been crucified on the cross of Calvary. Two days have passed, their hearts are still very heavy with grief. As they got closer they encountered a massive void when they reached the empty tomb, the one that was as mind-boggling as anything at the edge of the universe. It was early in the morning, and after meeting a young man and hearing about the resurrection, they fled from the scene, as they were filled with terror and utter amazement.

Put yourself in their shoes, can you imagine how empty Mary and the other two must have felt? You talk about a void - what do you say, how can you explain it? After all they had been through so much this last week that ended in the crucifixion of their close friend and teacher, Jesus. She is certainly mourning his death deeply. And now as she has gone to his tomb to pay her respects, and what does she find? Nothing. A huge cold spot. She was about to learn that *you’ve got to pass through some empty tombs on the way to resurrection life*.

The result is that we find death has been swallowed up in victory. That is the enormous

and essential message of Easter! That is why we have come here today - to hear once again that Jesus has overcome death for all humanity. Christ is alive. The final enemy has been conquered!

Now, with this acclamation we can go back to our story and look at what it might have to say to us for the living of our days.

We know all too well what it must have felt like for Mary and the other women as they faced grief and loss. Each of us, at some time in life, will come face to face with a mammoth void, a big empty place. It may be like this:

- When you give your heart to someone who doesn't accept the gift.
- When someone you have learned to trust turns on you and betrays you or abuses you.
- When you learn a sport, you practice hard and still don't make the team.
- When you study and work hard to pursue a profession, only to find you dislike or maybe even hate your work.
- When you work to create something beautiful, and discover that no one is interested in what you have done.
- When you try to resist a temptation, only to give in to it over and over.
- When you jump to a new job, only to lose it in a downsizing.
- When you put some money into a home, and then see your equity disappear.
- When you retire from a long career, and wake up with nothing to do.
- When you lose a spouse to cancer or some other way, and find yourself all alone in the world.

Yes, these are some of those humongous cold, empty spots. Leaving massive voids in life.

Mary and her companions are overcome by this unimaginable situation. They just can't figure it out and so are silent. Yet, what they knew from the past with this Jesus, feels like a billion light-years of empty space. But somehow in the midst of all this the words of the mysterious man at the tomb begin to sink into their thinking. Remembering him saying, "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here." All of a sudden they are faced with the good news of Easter! The Easter morning good news of resurrection life.

But for now it was only terror, fear and an empty feeling. How could they not be alarmed as they stand face to face with something they had never experienced before - an empty tomb?

Yes, we too get caught trying to pretend that there are no massive voids in our lives, no empty spaces. Jean Twenge, a sociologist, observes that we and particularly young adults in particular have been told things such as "believe in yourself and you can do anything" While the truth is that bad things can happen to good people, and not every goal in life is realistic. You may believe that you're going to earn a graduate degree and get a great job, along with a perfect family in a beautifully decorated home, but life doesn't always give you what you want. Twenge thinks that overblown expectations are largely to blame for the recent rise in anxiety and depression in young adults. She says, "It's depressing to realize that your unrealistic dreams are never going to come true."

We are all going to face some empty places in life, and we need to take them seriously.

For Mary and the other two women, they soon came to realize that Easter is not about them—instead, it is about God. It is about God filling the empty spaces in our lives with new

and unexpected life.

It is with the power of the resurrection that God is able to fill the empty spaces in our lives too.

What is also amazing is that we don't have to deserve or earn this change of life. What we do need to do is to believe in the resurrection power and be willing to follow this Jesus into the future. These are responses we can make, and these are the responses that will fill our massive voids.

If you are feeling an emptiness in your life, it can come true for you too. Your emptiness may not be eliminated by a new car, or new spouse, or new house, or better salary. Rather, the hole in your life can be filled by believing in the resurrection of Jesus, and can be fulfilled as you follow that Jesus into the future.

Here my friends, is the good news of Easter - Jesus the Christ is risen! Christ has been raised from the dead. This same Jesus is waiting for you - just ahead of you - to lead you through the massive empty that is beyond the empty tomb. Let's go and meet him!