

Mark

Lesson #19

The Resurrection

(Mark 16: 1-8)

Review

In Lesson #18 we examined the crucifixion in detail. We followed the sequence of events, from Pontius Pilate handing Jesus over to his executioners; the Roman soldiers flogging Jesus nearly to death, mocking and ridiculing him, beating him with batons and fists. We then followed Jesus on the “Via Dolorosa,” his agonizing journey to the cross, helped by Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus, two men known to Mark’s audience in Rome. And at the cross we saw Jesus brutally nailed to the wood, positioned between two murderers, revolutionaries who had conspired and acted with Barabbas.

Today we have witnessed Jesus crucifixion liturgically so often that we are numbed to its brutality and viciousness. Lesson #18 snapped the crucifixion into focus, intensifying its impact and sharpening its jagged edges.

Preview

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the single most important event in Scripture. Indeed, in addressing the church in Corinth Paul writes: *“But if Christ is preached as raised from the dead, how can some among you say there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then neither has Christ been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then empty is our preaching; empty, too, your faith”* (1 Corinthians 15: 12-14). Without the physical, bodily resurrection of Christ, our faith—no matter how authentic, how deeply felt, or how worthily expressed—is worthless.

The *Gospel according to Mark* gives only a brief account of Jesus’ resurrection, but like the gospel itself, the repercussions of the resurrection—what it meant to Mark’s original readers and to us—is of enormous consequence.

Review

In Mark, after being told by an angel that Jesus had been raised, rather than telling the other disciples and the world, “[the women] said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid” (16: 8).

And with that, the *Gospel according to Mark* abruptly ends. Mark’s narrative erupts from the starting blocks, speeds forward at a blistering pace . . . and then slams into a brick wall! Mark’s gospel simply stops at 16: 8.

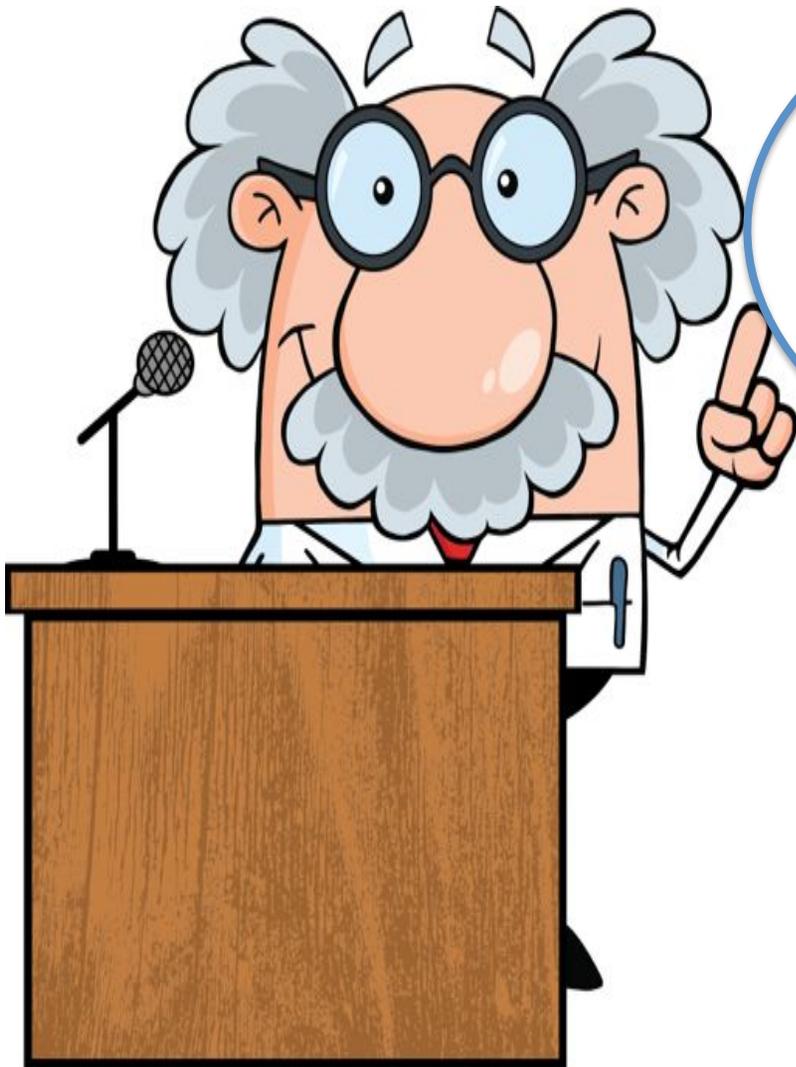
What is going on here?

In Lesson #19 we investigate.





Sandro Botticelli. *Lamentation over the Dead Christ* (tempera on panel), c. 1490-1492.
Alte Pinakothek, Munich.



To understand Jesus' resurrection we need to understand burial customs in the ancient world, especially those in 1st-century Palestine.



Jewish Burial Customs

- ✓ Throughout antiquity proper burial of a corpse was essential. In Homer's *Iliad*, Achilles cannot bear to part with the corpse of his beloved friend Patroclus, refusing him burial. Late at night the shade of Patroclus appears to Achilles in a dream:

*“Sleeping, Achilles? You’ve forgotten me, my friend.
You never neglected me in life, only now in death.
Bury me, quickly—let me pass the Gates of Hades.
They hold me off at a distance, all the souls,
the shades of the burnt-out, breathless dead,
never to let me cross the river, mingle with them . . .
They leave me to wander up and down, abandoned, lost
at the House of Death with the all-embracing gates.
Oh give me your hand—I beg you with my tears!*

Iliad, Book 23, 81-89



Jewish Burial Customs

- ✓ The Hellenistic Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria (c. 25 B.C.-A.D. 50) gives an imaginative account of Jacob grieving over Joseph being devoured by wild beasts:

“Child, it is not your death that grieves me, but the manner of it. If you had been buried in your own land, I should have been comforted and watched and nursed your sick bed, exchanged the last farewells as you died, closed your eyes, wept over your body as it lay there, given it a costly funeral and left none of the customary funeral rites undone”

(Of Joseph, 5, 22-23).



Jewish Burial Customs

- ✓ Proper burial was essential throughout Scripture. Moses warns the Israelites that if they disobey God's covenant their enemies will slay them and their "corpses will become food for all the birds of the air and for the beasts of the field," an unimaginable horror.

(Deuteronomy 28: 25-26).



1st-century Jewish Burial Customs

- ✓ In New Testament times, Josephus emphasizes the importance of a proper burial for all people, Jew and Gentile, friend and foe, alike:

“We must furnish fire, water, food for all who ask for them, point out the road, not leave a corpse unburied, show consideration even to declared enemies.”

(Against Apion 2.29, 211)



Jewish Burial Customs

- ✓ In the *Gospel according to John* we learn precisely how Jesus was buried. Joseph of Arimathea received Jesus' body from Pontius Pilate . . .

“[Then Nicodemus] came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes weighing about one hundred pounds. They took the body of Jesus and bound it with burial cloths along with the spices, according to the Jewish burial custom”

(John 9: 38-40).

Then they placed him in the tomb.



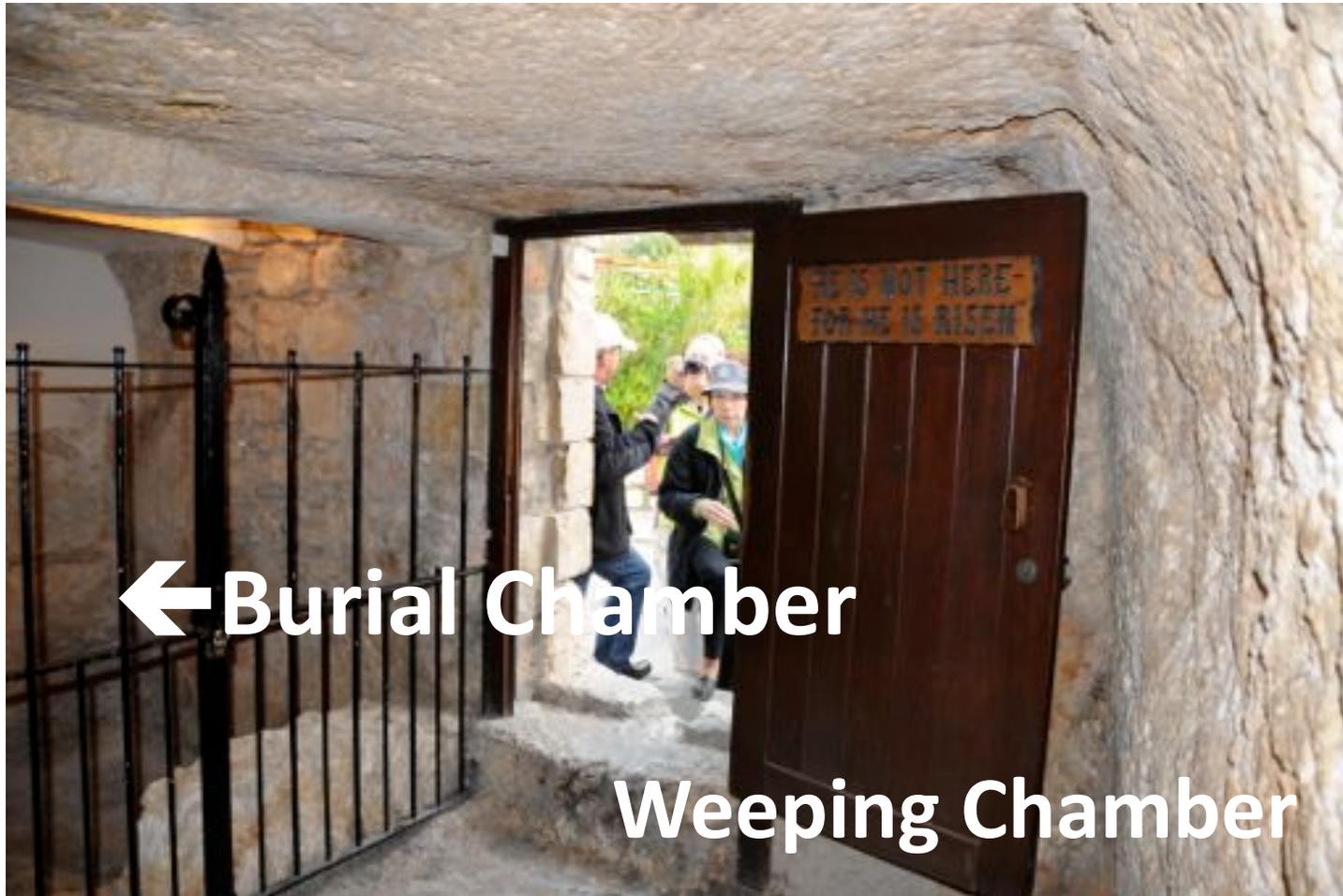
Anonymous. *Entombment of Christ* (Russian Icon), 15th century.
Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.



The Garden Tomb provides an excellent visual aid for discussing Jesus' burial and resurrection.
[As the late Catholic geographer and New Testament scholar Fr. Jerome Murphy-O'Connor once said to Dr. Creasy, "The Holy Sepulcher may have a greater claim to authenticity as the tomb of Jesus, but the Garden Tomb is a much better place to remember it!"]

Photography by Ana Maria Vargas

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Interior of the Garden Tomb, hewn out of rock.

Photography by Ana Maria Vargas

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Burial Chamber, where Jesus' body would have been placed.

Photography by Ana Maria Vargas

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A “rolling stone,” sealed the tomb.

Photography by Ana Maria Vargas

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“When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary, the mother of James, and Salome brought spices so that they might go and anoint him.”

(16: 1)



Fra Angelico. *The Women at the Tomb* (fresco), c. 1437-1436.

Convento di San Marco, Florence.

[Mary Magdalene leans over the empty tomb; St. Dominic prays at the bottom left.]

The Women at the Tomb

Matthew mentions two women; Mark, three; Luke, three and “others”; and John one.

- 1) **Matthew:** Mary Magdalene and the “other” Mary (the mother of James and Joseph), 28: 1 [c.f., 27: 56];
- 2) **Mark:** Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James (and Joseph), and Salome, 16: 1.
- 3) **Luke:** Mary Magdalene, Joanna (wife of Herod Antipas’ steward, Chuza—Luke 8: 3), Mary the mother of James (and Joseph) and “others who accompanied them,” 24: 10.
- 4) **John:** Mary Magdalene, 20: 1.



The women arrive to anoint Jesus' body and to pray, a ritual they would repeat throughout the year. At the end of the year, Jesus' body would be unwrapped and his bones placed in an ossuary, at which time the period of mourning would end.

“Very early when the sun had risen, on the first day of the week [Sunday morning], they came to the tomb. They were saying to one another, “Who will roll back the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?” When they looked up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back; it was very large. On entering the tomb they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a white robe, and they were utterly amazed.”

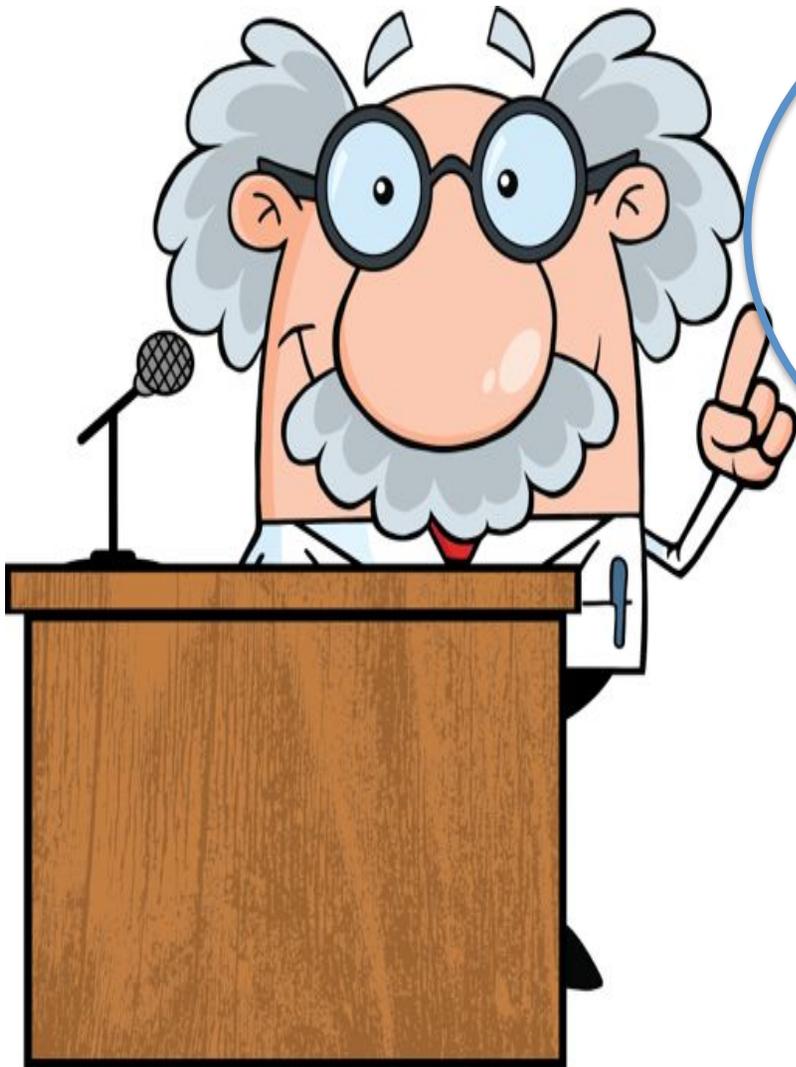
(16: 2-5)



“Angel in the Tomb,” *Pericopes of Henry II*, (illuminated manuscript, fol. 117r), c. 1002-1012.
Bavarian State Library, Munich.

“He said to them, ‘Do not be amazed! You seek Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Behold, the place where they laid him. But go and tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you.’”

(16: 6-7)

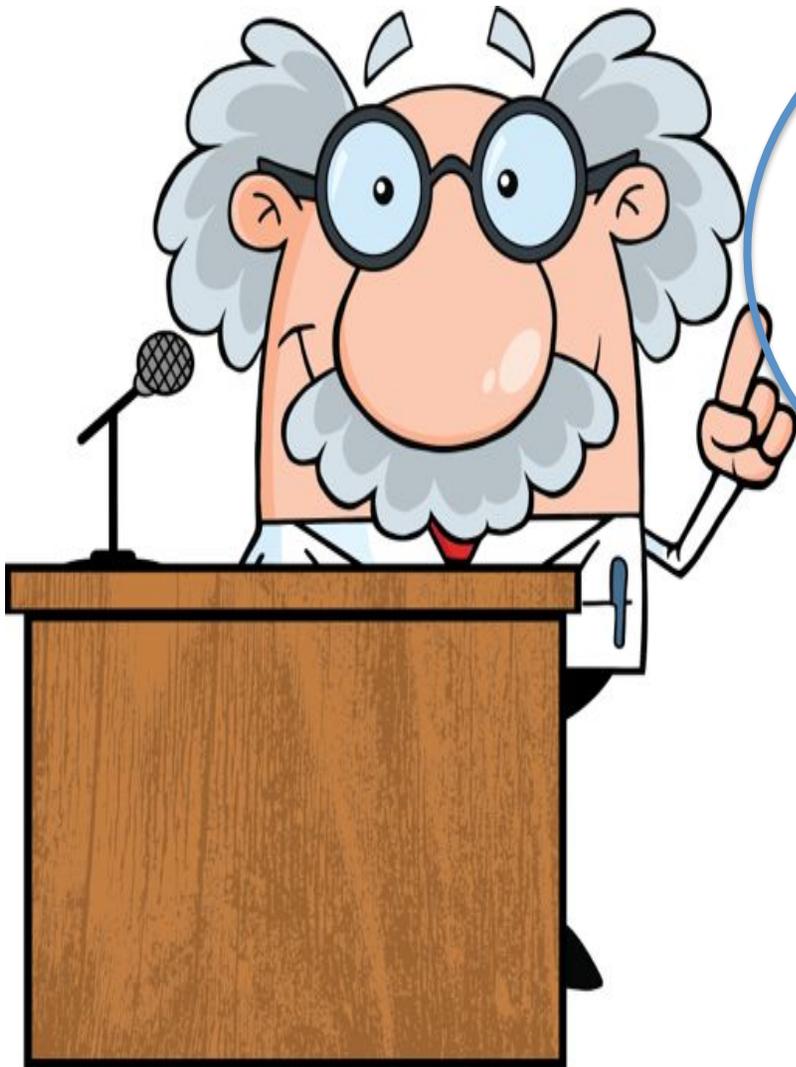


The angel said, “He is going before you to Galilee; then you will see him, as he told you.” That is exactly what Jesus said in 14: 28— “But after I have been raised up, I shall go before you to Galilee.”



The four Gospels differ in their account of Jesus' resurrection:

1. The exact time the women visit the tomb.
2. The number and identity of the women who visit the tomb.
3. The purpose of the women's visit.
4. The appearance and identity of the messengers, whether they are angelic or human.
5. The message to the women.
6. The women's response to the message.

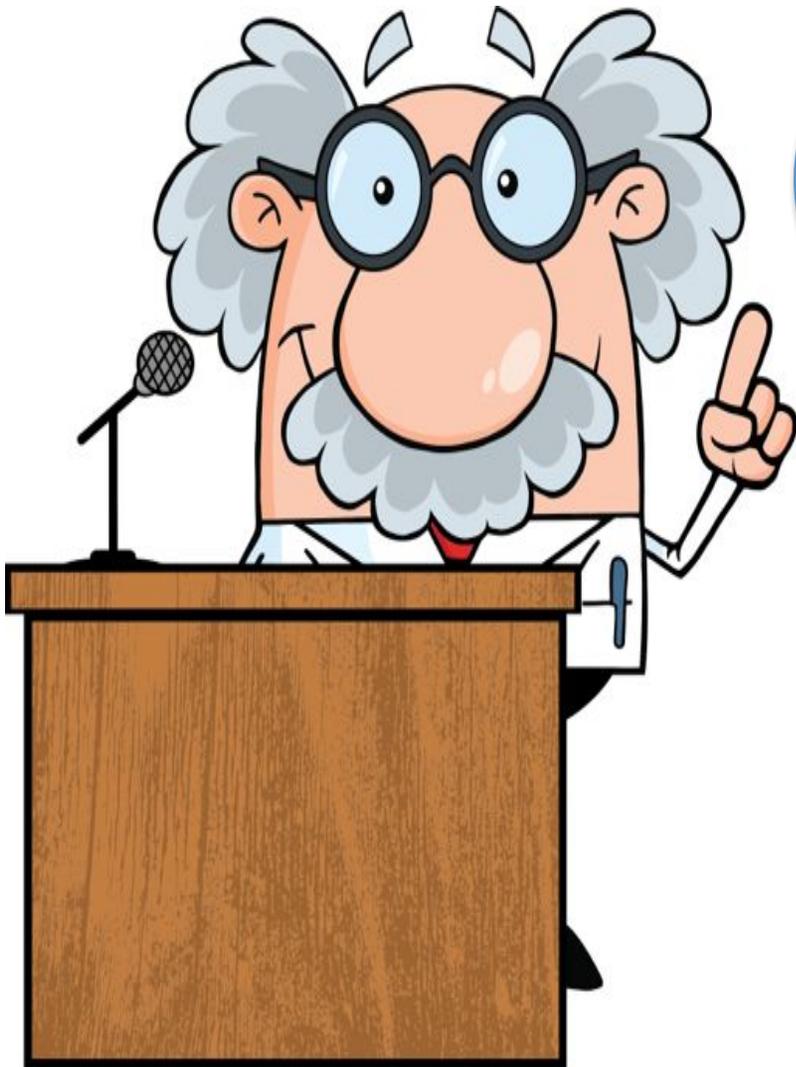


That is not to suggest that the Gospels contradict each other or give faulty information. Each Gospel writer selects material to include in his story, details that fit his narrative purpose and that have been filtered through the lens of a faith community across 30 years of oral transmission.

**In any case, all four Gospels
agree on four key points:**

1. All pay close attention to the large and heavy stone that had sealed the tomb.
2. The women visit the tomb on the first day of the week (Sunday).
3. Jesus appears first to the women, who are then commissioned to tell the men.
4. Mary Magdalene is the most prominent figure in the resurrection scene.





The Gospel according to Mark is unique among the four Gospels, however, in the women's reaction to the angel's message.

“Then they went out and fled from the tomb, seized with trembling and bewilderment. They said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.”

(16: 8)





When we read that the women were “afraid,” the Greek word is φόβος [*pho'-bos*]. It is much stronger than “afraid,” more in the sense of “terror” and “panic,” accompanied by “dread.” We get the English word “phobia” from it.

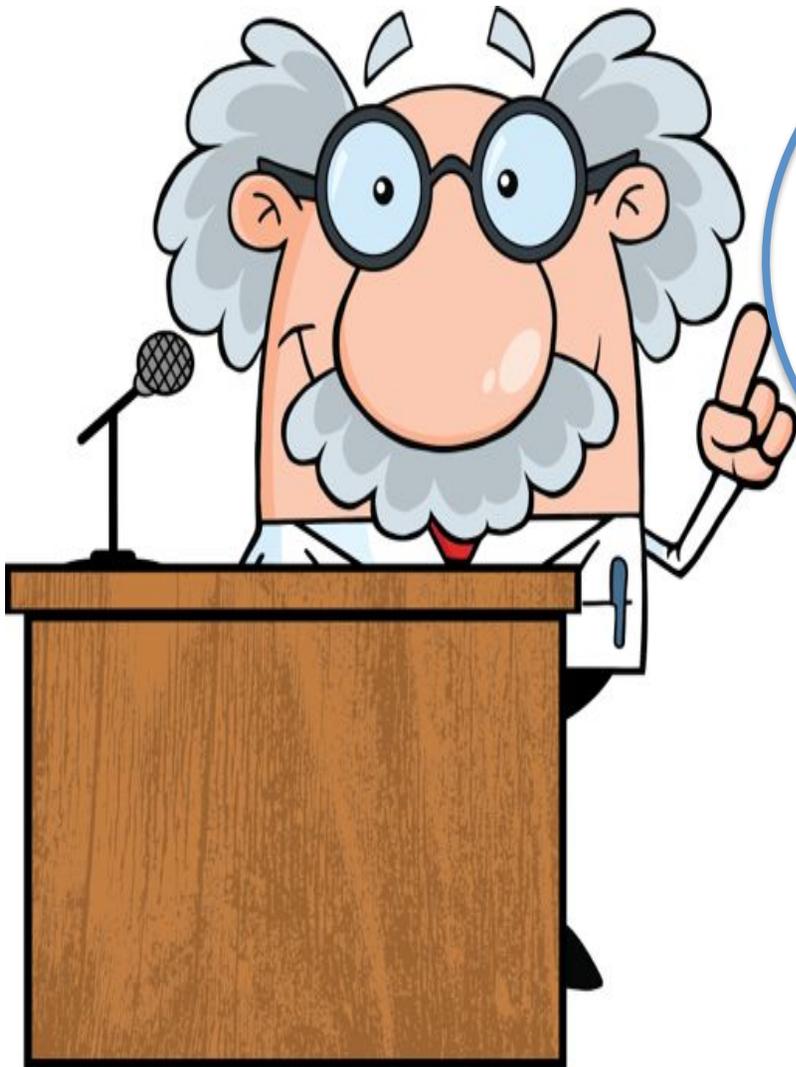
A better reading might be:

“Then they went out and fled from the tomb, seized with trembling and bewilderment. They said nothing to anyone, for they were terrified.”

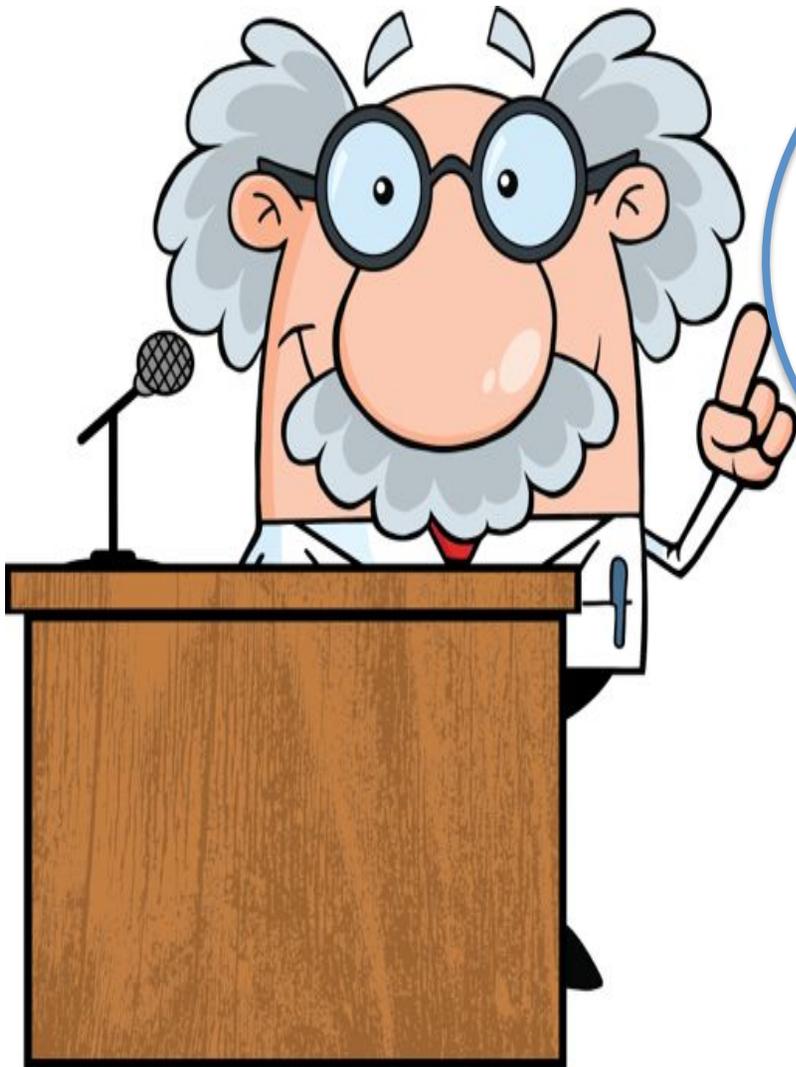
(16: 8)



**So, what's
going on here?**



Recall that Mark is writing for a Christian audience in Rome, in the context of the persecution under Nero in A.D. 64-68 and the beginnings of the Great Jewish Revolt, A.D. 66-73.

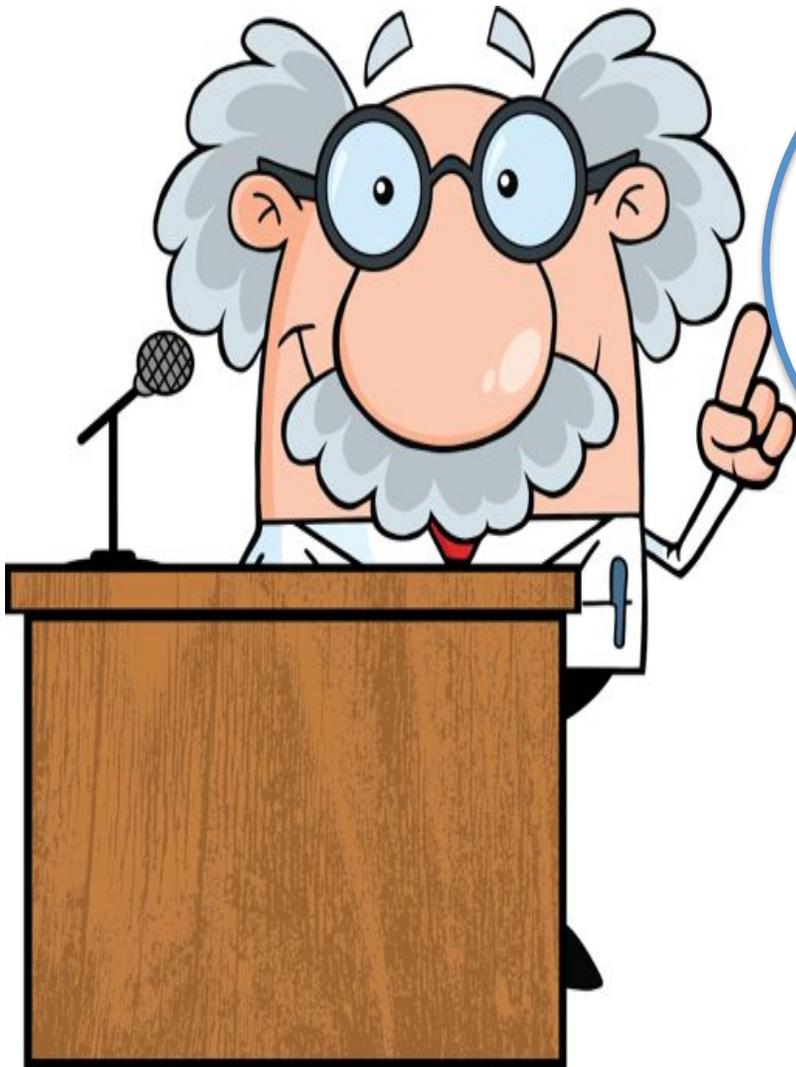


Read Dr. Creasy's translation that highlights Mark's prose style, relentless and rapid forward movement—and the sudden stop in 16: 8.

“**And** when the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene **and** Mary the mother of James **and** Salome bought spices in order that having come they might anoint him, **and** very early on the first day of the week, **they come** upon the tomb, the sun having risen, **and** they were saying to themselves, ‘Who will roll the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?’ **and** having looked up, they noticed that the stone **has been rolled** away, for it was extremely large, **and** having entered into the tomb they saw a young man sitting on the right, having been clothed in a white robe, **and** they were utterly astonished. But **he says** to them, ‘Do not be amazed; you are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, the one having been crucified. He was raised; he is not here: Look! the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples **and** Peter, ‘**He goes** before you into Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.’” ”

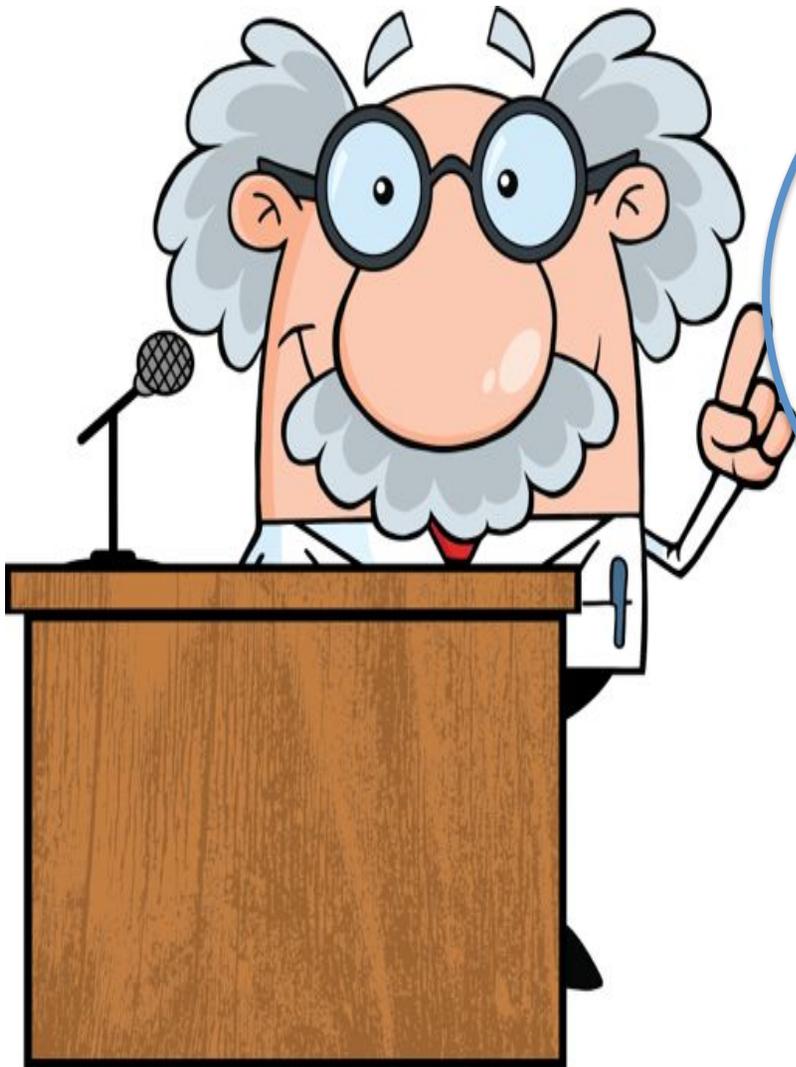
And having gone out, they fled from the tomb, for trembling **and** dread **gripped** them, **and** they said nothing to anyone, for they were terrified.

(16: 1-8)



Mark's Gospel is a dramatic "call to action," a proclamation to the Christians in Rome that there comes a time in life when one must stand on the deck of life and be counted, no matter what the cost.

And that time is NOW!



That is precisely what Pontius Pilate failed to do at Jesus' trial, and Dante insightfully placed him in the Vestibule of Hell, with those who failed to take a stand; those who belong nowhere, who spend eternity adrift in "nothingness."

Questions for discussion and thought

1. Why do the accounts of the women at the tomb differ in the four canonical Gospels?
2. What are the important similarities in each account?
3. Why does Mark's Gospel suddenly stop, with the women doing nothing, for they were "terrified"?
4. What is Mark's message to his audience, the people in the church in Rome, A.D. 64-68?
5. What is Mark's message to us, his audience today?

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