



"The Last Word" Sermon Series: "The Way of Jesus"

Mark 16:9-20

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Mark 16:9-20 (NIV)

("The most reliable early manuscripts and other ancient witnesses do not have Mark 16:9-20." Quote from Biblegateway.com)

⁹When Jesus rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had driven seven demons. ¹⁰She went and told those who had been with him and who were mourning and weeping. ¹¹When they heard that Jesus was alive and that she had seen him, they did not believe it.

¹²Afterward Jesus appeared in a different form to two of them while they were walking in the country. ¹³These returned and reported it to the rest; but they did not believe them either.

¹⁴Later Jesus appeared to the Eleven as they were eating; he rebuked them for their lack of faith and their stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen him after he had risen.

¹⁵He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. ¹⁶Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. ¹⁷And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; ¹⁸they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well."

¹⁹After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God.

²⁰Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it.

This morning we conclude our sermon series, "The Way of Jesus." A series that we began on September 13, 2009 and one that has included as many as **forty sermons from the Book of Mark**. The text that Deacon Shirley Kopp just read is one that usually appears in our Bibles with a preface saying that *the most reliable early manuscripts and other ancient witnesses do not include Mark 16:9-20*. It appears that the oldest manuscripts ended with Verse 8 and that some very eager copyist thought they needed to round off Mark's ending and so drawing from the Gospels of Matthew and Luke regarding the resurrection appearances and adding some additional materials they have provided us with this ending today. But that doesn't mean that there aren't important truths that we can learn from Mark 16: 9-20. So today, I've invited three members of our congregation to join us in a conversation about "The Way of Jesus" – spring boarding off of these verses.

But first, let's pray.

Loving God we come thankful for the joy of this day, for the gift of life itself and for the wonder of gathering around the throne to worship and praise your Holy name. Lord we come praying for your Holy Spirit to guide us as we converse about the way of Jesus the things that you want to teach us even this morning. So, come Holy Spirit, come and open our hearts and minds to your truth. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Let me introduce our friends:

≈ **Leigh Congdon** is fairly new to our WHPC community. Last August 15 she married Doug Congdon our High School Director and she came on board in the fall as the Assistant Director to our Middle School



ministries. Leigh went to a university in Minnesota and I understand that Leigh and Doug have a pet pig.

- ≈ **Martha King** has been a member of WHPC since 1985. She joined WHPC before she married Charlie and she is an elder here in our church. She has two children and the oldest Hillary will be heading to university next month. Martha is a CPA and two years ago she left her position as an executive at Ernst & Young to devote more time to family and ministry.
- ≈ **Tommy Broyles** has been a member since 1999. He is married to Anne and they have four children, 4, 6, 13 & 16 years of age. Tommy is an administrative law judge for the State of Texas and he has made as many as a half-dozen trips to China to work with an underground seminary in a place where the church is exploding.

Thank you for being here this morning.

Our text today reveals that Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene and to two on the road to Emmaus and to the eleven after the resurrection. So, my first question is, **have you had an encounter with Jesus that has been definitive or formational for you, as you follow the Jesus way?**

Leigh Congdon speaking: As I was thinking about this question, so many moments came to mind that have really changed the direction of my walk. But, one happened very recently, so I wanted to share that with you. My husband, Doug, and I were driving in the car. I was in the passenger seat and I was looking at him. I know this sounds cheesy, but newly married...I was just thinking about how much I love him and I told him, "I love you." Then I looked out the window and the sun was setting and the sky was just magnificent and I was overwhelmed with the greatest love I've ever felt in my life and it wasn't for Doug, it was for Christ. It began real to me all the passages that talk about everything on this earth being rubbish compared to knowing Christ. That passage was real to me for the first time. A few days later I was reading in Hebrews 11 and it talks about having a faith that God is unashamed of and that kind of faith is one that longs for Christ above all else – that understands that – that Christ is better than anything else. I feel like I've tasted just a little bit of what it means to live with that eternal mindset and I'm excited to keep experiencing it.

Marsha Smart speaking: I like the way you describe it has having a longing for Christ, because when I think about leaving my career, I think in large part that was based on a longing for a closer walk in life with Christ. I did feel like I was being both pushed and pulled to re-prioritize my energies and my time. I had been very committed to my career and I really strove to reflect Christ to my colleagues and my clients. However, I did feel like God was wanting me to make some changes and create some new emphasis on priorities and has my husband, Charlie, talked about what it would be like for me to stop working. We thought through: well it would change our household income by about half. We'd have to change the way we shop, the way we buy groceries, how much we go out to eat. It would probably result in some adjustment within each of our roles within our marriage and things like that. But one thing that was helpful, funny actually, was that we still lived in the same house that we had bought based on incomes when we were 27 years of age, so that was helpful to still be there and it is a very lived in house for sure. But we felt like if we were going to make changes to try to be closer to Christ that surely that would be ok and it really has been over the last two years through the ministries of this church, through more time with my family, through an opportunity to join the board of a Christian hospital. God has really showed me a more abundant life than what I had before. So He has brought me into a new season of life that I'm glad that He has done that and I look forward to what is ahead.

Tommy Broyles speaking: I wish that when I was...how old are you Leigh? You won't mind saying because you are young. (Leigh: "23.") I wish when I was 23 I had felt the way she does, but I didn't. Until I was mid-thirties, late thirties, I came to church, I prayed and I was here on Sunday, but I wasn't with God in my heart. I was just



walking through the life of a cultural Christian in America. When we turned 40, my wife had her really changing moment with God and that was when God told her for several months that she had a daughter in China. My wife fought it and fought it – we’re too old, we already have two kids, we don’t have enough money. Then she finally told me about it. We went to China and I thought you know that is it. We’re doing what God wants us to do. We’ve really accomplished something. But when I was over in China we were looking for some jade crosses. Those of you in the Dearman class, hello – you’ve already heard this. But we were looking for jade crosses and Lily is the woman’s name said, “You Americans are always here looking for these crosses. What is that?” I replied, “It is for Christians and we want to take that back.” She asked, “What is a Christian?” I said, “We’re followers of Jesus?” She asked, “Who is this Jesus?” At that moment I experienced the Holy Spirit in way that I really hadn’t since my conversion back when I was eleven years old. I really felt God just say that everything came to a stop and my belief system changed. I had been raised in Abilene, Texas, where we have three Christian universities and they still don’t allow drinking there and there are all kinds of things going on that make you think that Christianity is everywhere and everyone at least has the opportunity to know about Christ. But over the next few days while we were adopting Mia, God continued to speak to me and saying that I was coming back to China, this trip wasn’t just about adopting Mia – for you it is about you coming to share the good news with the Chinese. Therefore, that is what I’ve done. It has changed my life.

Dr. Friesen speaking: I don’t know what kind of milestones you’ve had on your journey. We are all on different journeys in that respect and it can take on different forms. But the milestones or even the valleys can be very intense experiences, but day-to-day it can be hard to follow Jesus. So, **I wonder what you found helpful in living out that commitment day in and day out?**

Tommy Broyles speaking: This is kind of like groundhog day. We did this just an hour and a half ago and I didn’t realize how difficult it was for you all. This is amazing that you are able to do this, because I forget what I said earlier and I get wandering here you’ll know. For me the hardest part is coming back from China. When I’m over there I’m someone who is sold out for God and really experience this mountaintop experience with Him. I’m going through it with some folks who are 5% of the population, who can’t get jobs because they are Christians, whose parents won’t talk to them, whose siblings have left them, can’t get medical care and they are so committed and they are around me, it is an experience I can’t explain. But it is the way that Paul, when I read Acts, it is his experience. It is the experience I should be having here, but I have a difficulty in coming about of that China experience and bringing it back to the U.S. where people have certain expectations of me. I’ve made mistakes, I’m bogged down, I’ve got a mortgage, I’ve got responsibilities, I have kids that I feel like I the need to raise in the best schools and give them the best opportunities. So that cognitive disconnect of knowing what I’m supposed to be doing, but I’m having a hard time doing it, is what is difficult for me here.

Martha King speaking: I like the way Tommy talked about the Book of Acts and one of the things that helps me a ton in just day-to-day trying to follow in Christ is reading and studying my Bible and it seems like there are lots of time when the Holy Spirit has just called to mind some piece of scripture that applies to just what I’m doing at that moment and I’ve come to really be grateful for that. As I understand the Holy Spirit I think that is one of the roles that God has in mind for the Holy Spirit for us is to call to mind scripture when we need it. Another thing that has helped me tremendously, day-to-day, is just being involved in the ministries of our church and they really continue to show me the example of Jesus and His way. For example, I think about “The Gathering” ministry and each week it reminds me how Jesus interacted one-on-one with people and how people would love them for just who they were, right then at that moment. I really learn a lot from that. I also think about the Detox class and that led me to follow Jesus into a prison, which reminds me of the way Jesus talks about that in the Book of Matthew and I think about the daily messages that come out of the Contemplative Christianity website. Those really coaxed me into being silent, to listen to the Holy Spirit,



receive the Holy Spirit and that is sort of a new thing for me and I'm a very slow learner and I'm just a beginner at recognizing the Holy Spirit more and more – but I really do like those daily messages. Then I also think about our Women's Ministry and it is really sort of uncanny how many times things in our Women's Ministry have just spoken directly to me and I know there are a lot of women in our church that have felt the same way. So, being in the Word and being involved in ministry really helps me stay the way of Jesus.

Leigh Congdon speaking: As Martha said, being in the Word is huge for me as well. There are the things we hear about all the time reading our Bible and being in prayer. Those are things that though they are the typical Christian things that you check off your list – I did that for ten minutes this morning – I've started to learn how to practice the presence of God and be in prayer all day long. Part of that has been memorizing scripture for me. God's Word is alive and active and when we have it in our hearts it is sort much more obvious – it comes to mind daily in almost everything that you do. You remember scripture that applies to every situation. The other thing that has helped me besides prayer and scripture is friendships. My best friend lives in Korea and we have a Skype date, we talk on the computer. We can see each other's faces every week. We usually talk for about two hours and lets a half hour of that every week is just praying over each other. We share our hearts, we pray together, we read scripture together. So having people that will walk along side of you and challenge you and encourage and holds you accountable, makes a huge difference in my walk.

Dr. Friesen speaking: Do you know what nurtures and nourishes your life with God? We are all different. For some people a group Bible study is very effective. For some others it can be a person that they mentor or are mentored by or just partner with. It is real important for all of us to identify the ways that we can be intentional in deepening our life with God and nourishing and nurturing that relationship. Another question that we can ask is – what quenches the Spirit within us? Not just what fuels or encourages it, but what dampens it and to become intentional in avoiding those things and choosing not to engage in those things that shut God out in ways that we don't encourage that relationship.

My next question is **what challengers have you found in walking the way of Jesus?** We see even in the text today that there were those who Mary Magdalene and two other on road to Emmaus encountered who did not believe. What challenges have you found?

Martha King speaking: I think I find that I have areas of unbelief in my life where I have a hard time trusting God with what is going to unfold in my life next. I have some inhibitions really that keep me from following Christ more closely and I'm still working to understand those and I'm trying to look to Christ and to scripture and pray about those and I trust that as I keep knocking and seeking that, as God promises, at some point I will find a way through His power to let go of those inhibitions and follow Him more closely. You know there are tons of things that are temptations to me on a regular basis: pride, self-absorption, fears – those things are a part of what quenched my following of Christ and I have to continue to work with that and depend on His spirit.

Tommy Broyles speaking: You know for me it is really fear. It is wanting to have a backup plan in case God isn't good enough. It is really hard to say that, but it is true. I want to be able to rely on my perfect provision for my kids, not God. When I am in China it is little different in that most of our friends there don't have any of that. They rely on God day in and day out. So, when I'm there I can get into that easily, move into that mode with them, and it is a wonderful experience. But, when I come back I really truly struggle. I get frustrated often times. Thank goodness I do as Carol was saying – some ways that I pull myself out of it: one of the ways is a good friend who will tell me that I'm just being prideful or he will really call me out. I think that we need that. Right now I'm just focusing in on praying to God and say God, You know I feel like I'm not achieving everything that you want me to. Help me.



Leigh Congdon speaking: I think one of the greatest challenges for me is fear. I fear what people will think if I really step out and do what I feel the Lord is calling me to do. I fear that I'll fail and that sin will get in the way and I'll mess up. I fear having to give things up or experience pain or loss. Jesus promises that the road to follow Him is difficult and narrow and it is really scary to walk into that and to know that you are walking into something that is going to hurt.

Dr. Friesen speaking: Fear, pride, mistrust. These are some of the challenges that we face in walking the way of Jesus and more often than not they are in us – the obstacles aren't out there. The obstacles are here. One thing that I've found helpful is even if I'm not willing yet to pray for the Spirit of God to help me become willing and amazing that God in His grace takes us wherever we're at. He will work with us wherever we are and helping us to continue on the way of Jesus. Our text this morning also included the Great Commission. **"Go therefore into all the world and preach the [good news] gospel to all creation." I wonder how does the Great Commission translate in your life?**

Martha King speaking: I'm one of the folks that helps to plan and coordinate the Confirmation Class for our ninth graders and I love confirmation for a couple of different reasons. One is that to me it is a time where our congregation comes together and intentionally shares with our teenagers what it is like to have a life with Christ and to invite them to accept that open invitation that Christ has for each of them to join into that life as well. To me it is also part of us fulfilling our vow as a congregation when a child or baby is baptized here to support them and to nurture them. It is part of continuing that vow – even though confirmation certainly is not intended for people who have already baptized – it is open to all ninth graders. I also like the way confirmation fits into our mission statement of inviting people into God's story and I like the way that it fits into our vision statement of being a Christ-centered community that intentionally nurtures relationships. Then I also I'm just always amazed at how God works through confirmation in terms of putting the parts of the body together and there are pastors from our church and staff members from our church, adults in the congregation, parents, older high school students that all come together to participate in confirmation. So, to me it is really a visual way of seeing the parts of the body working together and how God illustrates that.

Tommy Broyles speaking: So, for me I guess when I look around there are always needs, there is always a country to go to, a place here that needs folks taught. There are so many needs out there. I good friend, Sam Harrell, told me to look around and see where the Holy Spirit is working, find where your joy meets where the Holy Spirit is working and then go join them. I think that has been the key – the Holy Spirit is working in China and I have a lot of joy or a gifting or whatever it is from God that connects me with the Chinese and so I see where He is working and go join. It is interesting because it has come back now recently to Austin and I realize there is a lot of Chinese students at U.T. and I teach at U.T. some and have learned that they really need some Christians just to welcome them into their homes. You know God is delivering these Chinese who have never heard of Jesus to our airport and they need people to pick them up and they need people to show them around and just to love on them. Now I see another spot where the Spirit is working, my joy, my gifting is there – I love working with those kids, so my duty is to go join them.

Leigh Congdon speaking: I think the Great Commission is to proclaim the Gospel at all times in whatever you are doing. So, my prayer is that I do that in everything that I do: interacting with my friends, my husband, strangers on the street and in the grocery store. I don't want it to be just one section of my life that I serve, but something that I do daily in everything. The greatest thing for me is working with the middle schoolers though and you have to be thinking about what your purpose is in that position all the time. I want them to see the love of Christ in me. I want them stirred to know Christ through our time together. They hold me accountable to living out the Great Commission.



Dr. Friesen speaking: Thank you all. We've had this conversation this morning in hopes that you might continue it, perhaps today over lunch, or supper, in your journal or in your prayers that you will reflect on these questions.

- ≈ **Where are the milestones on my Jesus Way?**
- ≈ **Where have I encountered Jesus?**
- ≈ **What nurtures my faith?**
- ≈ **What quenches the Spirit?**
- ≈ **In what ways am I living into the Great Commission, right where God has placed me?**

I hope you will reflect on these questions.

I hope that we will continue to reflect on these questions as we follow Christ together.

Please pray with me.

Loving God, it is a great privilege and a great joy to be on the way together. I thank you Lord for Tommy, Martha & Leigh this morning in sharing their stories. I thank you for all the stories represented in this sanctuary. All the ways that you have been faithful to us. Lord, I do pray that you would continue to help us, to empower us on the Jesus way, that even as we move out of the Gospel of Mark into a new book that we would continue on the way together and that you would help us to be a source of encouragement and challenge one to another. We pray this is Jesus' name. Amen.

