

**Mark 16:1-8 N.T. 51 (NRSV)**

<sup>1</sup>When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. <sup>2</sup>And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. <sup>3</sup>They had been saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?” <sup>4</sup>When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. <sup>5</sup>As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. <sup>6</sup>But he said to them, “Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. <sup>7</sup>But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.” <sup>8</sup>So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

**Mark 16:1-8 N.T. Page 51**  
***“Now Appearing in Galilee”***

**Opening Prayer:** Please bow with me in prayer. Almighty God, we come into your presence today, to celebrate an empty grave. And just as you raised your Son Jesus from the dead, we know you will raise us from the dead too. By the power of your Holy Spirit, may your Word of Life be spoken, and heard, and understood in our gathering today. In Jesus’ Name we pray. **Amen.**

**Introduction:**

**It was during Holy Week** back in 2006 that Donna and I along with many of our family and friends took one of life’s most solemn journeys. We traveled in **my mother-in-law’s** funeral procession back in Donna’s home town of Indiana, PA. Anyway, **I remember a police vehicle**, its light flashing, escorted that solemn procession. Following behind the police vehicle were the funeral director’s car **and the hearse**. The next two cars were Donna’s two brothers and their families, and following behind them was Donna and I. Then, as I looked in my rearview mirror **I could see a long string of cars** following behind us trailing out of sight in the distance. Slowly, the procession snaked its way through downtown, through the heart of the IUP campus, and out toward Oakland Cemetery located just south of town. Dutifully each car in the procession followed one behind the other. **If the police escort** drove through a busy intersection, every car in the procession followed, **even if** the traffic light had turned red. The rules for a funeral procession are to follow the leader. Wherever the leader goes the procession will follow. **The mourners followed** the leader all the way to the grave.

**PAUSE**

**Move I.**

**Followers need a leader.** In fact, without a leader, followers cease to be followers at all. **They become just another group** of people wandering through life. It may look like the group knows where it's going, but if you ask any individual in the group, they'll probably say they're just going along with the crowd. We see this kind of behavior in the animal world. **Have you ever watched a flock of birds, a school of fish, or a herd of cattle?** These groups move around together, often in a very coordinated way, but usually you can't identify any specific leader. Without a leader, the group's movements are little more than reactions to the world around them.

**Back before I went into full-time ministry**, I used to drive by a sheep pasture every day on my way to and from work. I enjoyed watching the sheep. For the most part the sheep wandered around the pasture randomly eating grass. There appeared to be little rhyme or reason to the movement of the sheep. But if something frightening happened, it was amazing to watch the entire flock react. I remember one day as I was driving by the pasture, **my approaching car** scared one of the sheep near the fence. That sheep turned and darted off. **Simultaneously** every other sheep in the pasture turned and starting running in the same direction. The whole flock reacted together, even though they had no leader. **Moments later**, after my car had passed, the entire flock resumed their random eating patterns. On their own, a flock of sheep is just a leaderless mob. **They'd graze** in the same pasture until all of the grass was gone. **A flock of sheep needs a shepherd** to lead them from one pasture to the next. **A good shepherd** will lead his sheep into green pastures and besides still waters.

V

V

V

**Jesus referred to his followers as his flock.** Wherever Jesus would go, his followers would follow. But the crucifixion threatened Jesus' flock. **That day we call "Good Friday,"** had to appear as anything but good to Jesus' followers. **They had followed Jesus to the grave,** and now they found themselves leaderless.

**Our Bible lesson today** picks up with a few of Jesus followers' doing what we all do in times of crises. We fall back on our customs. According to Jewish custom, you could not leave a body unburied on the Sabbath. **So Jesus' followers hastily buried** his body just before sundown on Friday evening. But in their haste there hadn't been time to properly prepare Jesus' body for burial. **So at first light** after the Sabbath, a few women went to Jesus' grave to anoint his body with spices. **In Mark 16:1 (NRSV)** we read, **"When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him."** The women were doing the only thing they could think of to do. Without their leader, Jesus followers we're left to react according to their customs. So they instinctively went to anoint his body with spices. **The crucifixion caught Jesus' followers off guard.** Without their leader they were all bewildered and confused. **Yes, followers do need a leader.**

**End I.**

## Move II.

**And now Jesus leads the way in resurrection.** On that first Easter, Jesus' followers weren't expecting what came next. **They had seen Jesus die** on the cross. **They had seen** Joseph of Arimathea lay Jesus' body in the grave. **As the women approach Jesus' grave**, they expected to find Jesus' body, still rapped in linen cloth; just as dead as when they had left it on Friday evening. *“If the resurrection depended on the faith of Jesus' followers, Jesus would still be laying in that grave.”* They're faith was virtually non-existent.

**But God raised Jesus** from the dead even though no one was expecting it. Even Jesus' closest disciples, the three guys in his inner circle, **Peter, James, and John** didn't expect the resurrection. Jesus had told them that he must die, and that he would raise form the dead, but none of them really understood that. **Earlier, in Mark 10:33b-34 (NRSV)**, Mark quotes Jesus as saying: **“the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles; they will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again.”** Jesus laid the whole scenario out for them, yet even when they saw these events unfolding before their eyes, they still weren't expecting the resurrection.

**How many of you** know how to ride a bike? Riding a bike is one of those skills that isn't easy to master, but one you've learned how, you never forget. When you learned to ride a bike, **did you read a stack** of text books about bike riding? **Did you watch videos** on YouTube explaining the role of the inner ear in balancing yourself on a bike? **Did you listen advice** from professional bike riders about how to ride a bike? I see you all smiling. You can't learn how to ride a bike from reading a book or listening to others tell you how. You have to experience bike riding to learn to ride a bike. **So you jump on a bike**, probably with mom or dad hanging on the back, and just give it a try.

**Jesus knew** his disciples weren't going to understand the resurrection just by being told about it. So Jesus went ahead and showed his disciples. **Jesus was obedient unto death**, even unto death on a cross, confident that God would never leave him in the grave. Jesus went ahead of his disciples both into death **and into the resurrection**. See, Jesus' resurrected forever changed his followers. Now they had faith in God's promise of the resurrection **even as they faced death** themselves.

**As the women stood** there looking into Jesus' empty grave, an angelic messenger reminded them of something else Jesus had told them that they had forgotten. **Back in Mark 14:27-28 (NRSV)**, Mark writes **“‘You will all become deserters;’** Jesus told them, **‘for it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.’ But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.’”** Had they only listened to Jesus and remembered what he told them, **they would never have been looking** for Jesus in the garden tomb. No, they would have left Jerusalem **and headed north to Galilee** to find Jesus. **That's why I chose to titled** today's message about Jesus' resurrection, *“Now Appearing in Galilee.”* **The graveyard was no place** to be looking for Jesus, Galilee was.

Jesus is always leading the way. **Jesus led the way** to death, even death on a cross. **And now Jesus leads the way in resurrection too.**

**End II.**

**Move III.**

**So, let's keep following Jesus' lead.** Discipleship is all about following. By definition to be a Christian is to be a follower of Jesus. You can't be a Christian if you won't follow Jesus' lead. Yet, following doesn't come easy. **We all have an independence streak.** We think we know what's best for us. We think we can find our own way in life. **We keep looking in the grave when Jesus told us to go and look in Galilee.**

*The Apostles' Creed* is the oldest summary of the basic beliefs of the Christian faith going all the way back to the second century A.D. Converts to Christianity recited early versions of *The Apostles' Creed* to profess their faith at their baptism when they joined the Church. *The Apostles' Creed* is a personal statement of the beliefs that all Christians hold in common. **It starts with the words "I believe."** "**I believe in God the Father Almighty**." "**I believe in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord**." And, "**I believe in the Holy Spirit**." Clearly *The Apostles' Creed* is Trinitarian. **But what does *The Apostles' Creed* tell us about where Jesus is leading us after Easter?** Let's look at the end of the second paragraph, the paragraph about what we believe about Jesus. Let's recite those lines together—they're on the screen.

**Jesus was crucified, died, and was buried.  
On the third day he rose from the dead;  
He ascended into heaven  
And sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.**

So where is Jesus leading the way now? **Jesus is leading the way to the Father in heaven.** After Jesus' resurrection, **he led to the way to Galilee** where he appeared to hundreds of his followers. **Jesus then continued to lead the way by ascending to heaven where he now sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.**

V

**But many think** of heaven strictly as a place you go after you die. Many think, **“Heaven is fine, but I have to live in the here and now on earth today.”** To such people Jesus is all about the afterlife, but Jesus doesn’t have much relevance to their day-to-day life today. But Jesus didn’t just come to tell us about living after death, **Jesus also came** to tell us about living before death too. After all, the command to **“love your neighbor as yourself”** applies as much to life today and it does to life in the hereafter. **Through the Spirit** of Jesus Christ living within you, Jesus continues to lead the way today. **The question is** will you follow Jesus’ lead? **Or do you prefer** to go your own way?

**There’s a favorite old hymn** written by Ernest W. Blandy called **“Where He Leads Me.”** It’s a hymn about being obedient to God. Jesus was obedient to God, even unto death, death on a cross. Will you be obedient to God too? Listen to the words of the refrain of Blandy’s hymn:

**Where he leads me I will follow,  
Where he leads me I will follow,  
I’ll go with him, with him, all the way.**

**Jesus is leading** the way to God’s kingdom. A kingdom where people do God’s will here on earth just as they do his will in heaven. Jesus is leading the way to life, abundant and free.

**On the first Easter Jesus** led the way to share the Good News in Galilee. **Through the power of the Holy Spirit,** Jesus went on to lead the way to share the Good News in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to ends of the earth. Jesus is still leading the way to **sharing the Good News** even here in Erie. **So, let’s keep right on following Jesus’ lead.**

**End III.**

**Conclusion:** In a funeral procession, the mourners follow the lead car all the way to the cemetery. **Yes, followers need a leader.** Jesus is the good shepherd. Jesus is the leader of his flock, the Church. **And Jesus leads the way in resurrection.** Just teaches his disciples by leading the way. **So, let's keep following Jesus' lead.** Let's follow Jesus in sharing the Good News in Galilee, Judea, and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. ***“Now Appear in Galilee,” Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth, Jesus!*** Let's go with him, with him, all the way!

**Closing Prayer:** Let's pray. We thank you O Lord, for not leaving Jesus in the grave. You raised Jesus to life as you will raise us to life too. May we always follow Jesus' lead. **Amen!**

**10:30 Closing Hymn: “He Lives, He Lives!” Red Hymnal No. 310**

**Sending Forth:** He is risen, He is risen indeed. As Jesus' disciples, the Spirit of Jesus lives within your heart. Go forth, and keep on following Jesus' lead. **Amen!**