

Father in heaven, we come this morning now to set our hearts and our minds above where Christ is. We come to look beyond this world, to look above the stars and the galaxies of this universe, and to see the Lord Jesus Christ enthroned between the cherubim on the throne of grace and mercy. When we come, Father, this morning and we pray that you will speak to your people this morning, that your strength will be made perfect in my weakness. You'll cause the word to spread rapidly that it might be seen and felt that the excellence of the power here this morning belongs only to you as always and never to me or any other human agent, oh God. and that the word of Christ will perform validly in our midst, uniting all of our hearts to fear your name, saving the lost, restoring the backslider, and making all of our hearts your own, oh God. And we offer these prayers in Jesus' name, amen. And if you would please take your scriptures and turn with me in the gospel of Mark to the last chapter of Mark, which is chapter 16. Taking a brief break from our studies in John's gospel. We'll pick up the reading in verse one and we'll read down to verse eight Please listen very carefully, this is the word of God. When the Sabbath was passed, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome, brought spices so that they might go and anoint him. And very early in the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. And they were saying to one another, Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb? And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back. It was very large. And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe. And they were alarmed. And he said to them, do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen. He's 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 just as he told you.' "'And they went out and fled from the tomb for trembling, "'and astonishment had seized them, "'and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.'" Amen, the grass withers and the flower falls off, but the word of God endures forever. Well, living in the gap between expectation and reality can be a painful, a lonely, a harsh spot to be in. The difference between what you expected God to do and what he did do can be very great, and it can be bewildering to find yourself betwixt and between. As we shall see, these women find themselves in the gap, between expectation and reality. They expected Christ to come to Jerusalem and conquer his enemies, not to be conquered by them. They expected him to rule forever from Jerusalem with a crown of glory on his head and that the knowledge of God would cover the earth as the waters cover

the sea. That's what they expected. Reality was very different. He was butchered outside Jerusalem on a Roman gibbet between two thieves crying not with glory but with thorns. As brutal a reality check as ever there was one. Expectations, reality. That's gonna be a problem too for many of the men and women and boys and girls Mark writes his gospel to. Mark is writing. in the middle of the first century. Within 10, 15 years, Nero will be on the throne and will be butchering some of these very people. Some of Mark's first audience will be sent out into the Colosseum where they will face ravenous lions and predacious bears who will tear them apart limb from limb. Others will have the equally unpleasant fate of being hung up in cages covered in pitch and set alight to provide a bright ambience for Nero's evening soirees. We aren't the only ones who have soirees in Colombia. Nero had them too, and he burnt our brothers and sisters alive to light up the night sky. Talk about expectations and reality.

Could you imagine being one of those Christians, waiting with the pitch dripping down from your hair and your shoulders down to your toes, waiting for Nero's lackey to come with the torch to set you ablaze? You're serving a risen Christ expectation, but what a reality check. Perhaps that's where you find yourself this morning. Perhaps you expected a growing business. After all, as the TV preachers tell you, expect your best life now. You expected that, but you got a contraction instead. Perhaps you expected a long married life, but you're still single and there's no prospect of marriage on the horizon. You begin to wonder, will anyone ever consent to be your bride or to be your husband? Or perhaps you got married and you expected a nursery full of children, but the reality was barrenness. Or perhaps you expected good health. All things work together for good, right? But instead of good health, you've got a body crippled with arthritis or an autoimmune disease or cancer. Remember you're looking forward to retirement, you've finally got the kids out from under you, grandchildren being born, and you think, praise the Lord, we can finally enjoy these few years and spend our hard-earned retirement money and travel the world. And then your spouse comes down with cognitive impairment or early Alzheimer's disease. and you see an increasingly blank look on their eyes, their smile has lost its luster, and as their memories die, it feels like a little bit of you is dying with them. Because it is, you're joined to them, they're part of you, and as their mind dies and their memories die, part of you is dying with them and you feel expectations, reality. And you come this morning, and perhaps if you're honest, you're disappointed. Disappointed with life, disappointed with yourself, and perhaps even just a little bit disappointed with God. You expected things to be so much better than they are. Well this morning, our text confronts us with true expectations. What can you expect? from the

Lord Jesus Christ. And there are three things in our text we can see, three expectations that if you lodge your heart in Christ looking for these things, he will never disappoint you. And the first thing we see is that he will be faithful when you least expect it. He'll be faithful when you least expect it. And you see that there in verse five. And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side. dressed in a robe, a white robe, and they were alarmed. He said to them, do not be alarmed. 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 just as he told you. Now I'll come back to that in a second. He'd be faithful when you least expect it. Whatever else these women were expecting, I think it's safe to say they were not expecting Easter. See them in your mind's eye as the pre-dawn darkness turns to gloomy light as the sun begins to rise. They're trudging toward the empty tomb, though they don't know it's empty. Their heads are down, they're practically upon the tomb before they lift their heads up and see the stone is rolled away. They're 36 hours out now from the bleakest event of human history. They've seen the lifeless corpse of God the Son laid in the grave. Now think about that for a second. that heard his voice, what a voice, a voice that spoke the universe into existence, a voice that taught with authority, a voice that commanded the darkness of blindness to go away, the guilt of sins to be forgiven, that called Lazarus, a dead man, out of the tomb, Never a man speak as this man, and yet to these woman's mind, he'll never speak again. His voice is silent in the grave. Think about his eyes, those brown eyes that sparkled with such kindness and crystal clear clarity that when they looked at you, You felt as if he saw right down to the depths of your soul because he did. He knew you. He looked at the rich young ruler and he loved him. He looked at the Pharisees and saw the hardness of their heart. Those eyes that saw the widow's mite drop into the coffer, nobody else noticed but the sharp-eyed tenderness of Jesus. He saw them. Those eyes, those all-seeing eyes have closed. Death has clouded them, blinded them. And to the eyes of these women, they're shut forever. Or think of his hands, those hands that gathered the little boys and girls up into his embrace, blessed them. Those hands that made mud and spittle into a paste and smeared it so gently, so powerfully upon the eyes of the blind man. Those eyes that reached out and touched the leper and that rested so tenderly on the coffin outside of Nain. Those hands now dangle limp. as Nicodemus and Simon struggle to manhandle the corpse of Jesus up into the grave. Think about that. These women expected so much and now it's all gone. He's dead. He who said, I am the

resurrection

and the life is dead. and they trudge toward the grave, despondent, discouraged, depressed. Their heads are dying. Suddenly, as they're carrying all these spices to the grave, it suddenly dawns on them, hold on a second, the stone. Girls, what are we thinking? There's a huge stone, several thousand pounds worth, and it took all the strength of a company of men to push it down that little slope into the groove that lodged it before the tomb's entrance. If those men struggled to get it going down that hill into that groove, how are we gonna move it out of the way? And you just hear their mind just lost in the logic of unbelief and grief. Whatever they were expecting, they're not expecting Easter. That's when they come to the tomb and they enter the tomb and they see this angel and they hear the voice. And there you will see him, just as he told you. Do you hear the gentle rebuke? Now let's speak before we even go there for a second. These women showed up, the disciples didn't, but the woman did. Young people, 90% of life is showing up. And nine times out of 10, when the men don't show up, the woman do. These women showed up, but they weren't expecting Easter. but they stand before us as an illustration of the danger of letting your expectations outrun the word of God. Never expect God to do for you what he's not promised, but when you have a promise from God, expect him to do everything he has promised. He will do what he has said. None of his words will fall to the ground, just as he told you. And he'd been telling them for weeks and weeks and months. If you go back in Mark's gospel

a second to Mark 8, this is the easiest chain of reference that you'll ever remember. Mark 8, 31. Mark 9, 31. Mark 10, 32. It's easy. Mark 8, 31. And Jesus began to teach them that the son of man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed and after three days rise again. Mark 9 31, over the page. For he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, the Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days, he will rise again. Then Mark 10, 32. And they were on the road going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them, and they were amazed. And those who followed were afraid. And taking the 12 again, he began to tell them what was to happen to him, saying, see, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles, and they will mock him and spit on him and flog him and kill him, and after three days, he'll rise again. You will see him, just as he told you. And that's one of the reasons

I love this book. W.C. Fields read it famously looking for loopholes. I read it looking for promises.

Because when you have promises of God in your hands, you have something that is more certain than the ground beneath your feet. If you confess your sins, he is faithful and just to forgive you your sins. and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness, just as he told you. All things will work together for your good, just as he told you. In my father's house there are many mansions. If it were not so, I would have told you. Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. I will never leave you or abandon you. I will never forsake you. I will never forget you. When you pass through the waters, they will not overflow you. When you pass through the fires, you will not be burned. Goodness and mercy shall follow you all of the days of your life. Ask, and you shall receive. Seek, you shall find. Knock, it shall be opened unto you. For everyone who asks receives. He who seeks finds, and to him who knocks, it shall be opened. And you go on and on and on and on in the Bible, and you find promise after promise after promise. J.C. Rye, when he was a young lad, worked in his grandfather's bank. And his job was to sign bank notes. And he said, what a difference the stroke of a pen can make. You've got a worthless piece of linen paper, and then you sign it. I promise to pay on demand the bearer 50 pounds sterling. And the signature of the banker changes the value of the paper. When you're dealing with this book, you're dealing with the promises of God. Just as he told you. What can you expect this morning? He's not promised you a rose garden. But you can expect him to be faithful when you least expect it. Secondly, you can expect him to be merciful when you least deserve it. Where do you see that? You see it on a little bit. Actually, back a little bit. Entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side dressed in white. a white robe, and they were alarmed. He said to them, do not be alarmed. You see Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified? He is risen, he's not here. See the place where they laid him, but go tell his disciples and Peter. Now I put it to you this morning that angels are the most obedient creatures in existence. The psalmist says, bless the Lord, you his angels, mighty in strength, who perform his word, obeying the voice of his word. Bless the Lord, you, all you his hosts, you who serve him, doing his will. Angels obey the voice of God's word. They perform his word. They do his will, not their own. They're not prone to improvise. Everything about this appearance of this angel reveals the heart of the Lord Jesus Christ. And isn't he lovely? So the appearance of the angel, they saw a young man, like a teenager. And angels don't have bodies, they're spirits. But they can take physical appearance, and sometimes, That's pretty impressive, like revelation. All those wings and eyes and

it's pretty awesome, right? They often come with pyrotechnic sound effects like thunder and lightning. Explosions, earthquakes. And they shine like the sun and its strength so that people often fall down almost dead. And then when they wake up, they start trying to worship the angel. And the angel says, no, don't worship me. You should worship God, right? But they're pretty impressive, and they can be pretty overwhelming. And I can imagine in my mind's eye this angel being commissioned. And Jesus is saying, hold on a second. When you go, none of the Sinai stuff. These women are half-past dead with discouragement. If you do all the explosions, lightning, thunder, lights and big sound, you'll terrify them. They'll have a heart attack and die. So don't do any of that. What do you want me to look like? I don't know, like a teenager. Just go and sit in the tomb and just look as non-threatening as possible. A young lad, that's it. Young lad, white dress, even ditch the wings. And then what they said, the message, this is fresh from the mouth of Christ. Like whenever the angel said, what do you want me to say? Jesus didn't say whatever you want, it's fine, just go. Now, the angel said just what Jesus told him to say, which was, go tell my disciples. And Peter, now if you were an angel, you would never question Jesus, but you might ask him a question. You might say, hold on a second, Jesus. Is that not a bit redundant? I mean, *semper brevitatis et claritas*, always brief and clear, right? So I learned in second grade English, you shouldn't use too many words, it's bad. So isn't, like Peter, one of your disciples? Just say, go tell my disciples. You don't need to say, I'm Peter. Anymore than you would say, I'm Bartholomew and Matthias and all the rest of them. No, just say, go tell my disciples. And in my mind's eye, I hear Jesus say to him, yes. You know Peter's one of my disciples. And I know Peter's one of my disciples. But right now, Peter's not so sure. All Peter can think about are the events of Thursday night. Turn back in your Bibles quickly to Mark 14. Verse 65. And some began to spit on him. and to cover his face and to strike him, saying to him, prophesy. And the guards received him with blows. That's Jesus, of course. Thus Peter was below in the courtyard, and he's within eyesight of Jesus. Remember, they can see one another. One of the servant girls of the high priest came, and seeing Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said, you also are with the Nazarene, Jesus. But he denied it, saying, I neither know nor understand what you mean. And he went out into the gateway and the rooster crowed. And the servant girl saw him and began again to say to him, to the bystanders, this man is one of them. He's got that weird accent, the thing they do with their vowels in the south, like he's definitely not one of us, he's one of them. But again, Peter denied it. And after a little while, the bystanders again said to Peter, certainly you are one of them, for you are a Galilean. But he began

to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, I do not know this man of whom you speak. Now, that's very important. Peter there wasn't like using the F word, right? He wasn't cursing like that, young people. To invoke a curse upon yourself is to say, "'Let me be damned if ever I knew that man.'" That's pretty persuasive, actually, isn't it? You think, wow, that's... And Luke says, the moment Peter said that, the Lord turned and looked at him. And the rooster crowed. And Peter realized what he'd done. and he went out and he wept bitterly. That was Thursday night. Peter's done nothing else, I think, but weep all weekend long until he's got no tears left to weep. And so I can see Jesus in my mind's eye say to the angel, if you just go and say, go tell my disciples, Peter's gonna be wondering what about me. Does he mean me as well? Am I still included? Am I beyond the pale? Is there a way back for me after all that I've done? I said, let me be damned if ever I knew that man. Maybe that's a prayer Jesus will answer. And so Jesus says to the injured, listen carefully to me. If you forget everything else, don't forget this. If you do nothing else, do this. You tell him, go tell my disciples and Peter. And that's not just Christ on a good day. That's Christ all day, every day. That's his heart. When he dies in your place for your sins, he has loved you with a love that will never let you go. It doesn't matter what you do, what he has done is enough. And as you come back to him, he will receive you. All who come to me, I will never cast out. I love that word, all. It's bigger than all the world. It's longer than all of history. It embraces every human being on the planet. If all come, I'll not cast them out, means if you come, I'll not cast you out. And if there was an Anne Peter for a blaggard like Peter, a self-centered, protective idiot like Peter, like me, there'll be an Anne Peter for you this morning when you need it, and you all do. much more than you think. He'll be faithful when you least expect it. He'll be merciful when you least deserve it. And lastly this morning, I want you to see, he will be fearful when you finally grasp it. Verse eight, and they went out and fled from the tomb for trembling. and astonishment had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid." Now, there are many scholars who believe, and I'm inclined to join them, that these are the last words of Mark's gospel. Some of the earliest manuscripts don't include the rest of the chapter. It's not a huge deal, but it would be certainly an interesting way, a counter-predictable way, for Mark to leave you with the last word of fearfulness. These women are about to meet the risen Christ and they're filled with fear. That's been a constant theme in Mark's gospel. When people meet Jesus, they

come away feeling a little bit uncanny. When they see who he is, they don't feel comfortable. They don't feel at home. Jesus is not their homeboy. Like in Mark 4, in the sea, when there's this terrible hurricanic storm comes down upon the Sea of Galilee, and the fishermen, these are seasoned fishermen, are terrified. And Christ wakes up and speaks to the hurricane like it was a three-year-old child acting out in the backseat of a car. Be quiet! And immediately, the sea doesn't even have time to calm down, immediately it's a glassy calm. And he said to them, why are you so afraid? Have you no faith still? And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, who then is this that even the wind and the sea obey him? Next chapter, chapter five. They come to Jesus and he's just healed this demon possessed man, Legion. He's got so many demons. He's infested by thousands of demons. And nobody could calm him or quell those demons. And Jesus cast him out with a word. And when the people from the area of Gadarenes come and they see him, sitting there clothed in his right mind, they were afraid. Later in that chapter, when the woman with the flow of blood, who'd been bleeding all that time, and Christ is being pulled by Jairus, remember, through the crowd, people are pressing in on all sides, and this woman reaches out and touches Jesus. and says to herself, if I just touch the hem of his garment, I'll be healed. And she touches him and she's healed. And Christ turns around, you remember, and says, who touched me? Which is like, the disciples are going, that's a stupid question. Everyone's touching you, right? But Jesus knew that someone had reached out to him in faith. He always does. If you're in this crowd, the people here this morning, and your heart is reaching out to Jesus by faith, he knows. Who touched me? And the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in, in fear and trembling, and fell down before him and told him the whole truth. The next chapter, whenever the disciples are by themselves in the boat, rowing against the storm, and Christ up on the mountain praying, and he comes down, and he walks across the sea to them. And the fourth watch of the night, and he meant to pass them by, remember? But when they saw him walking on the sea, they thought it was a ghost and cried out, for they all saw him. and were terrified, but immediately he spoke to them and said, take heart, it is I. Do not be afraid. And then later in the next chapter, or chapter nine actually, sorry, in the Mount of Transfiguration, Peter, James, and John go up the mountain. Moses, Elijah appear, meet Jesus. Peter doesn't know what to say, so he opens his mouth wide and puts both feet in. and says, Rabbi, it's good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah. And the disciples are going, where did you get that idea? That's the stupidest thing I've ever heard in my life. But Mark says, he did not know what



to say, for they were terrified. They saw Jesus in his glory, and they were terrified. Now why, why the fear? Because fear is what you feel when you come face to face with the reality that is overwhelming. For me, it's your guy who climbed

El Capitan, and his name's going to my head now, with no ropes, right? Incredible. And he's standing

there on the side of El Capitan, 3,000 feet of granite, sheer granite, and there's a ledge. Like, half the size of the top of this pulpit. He's standing there with his

heels on this ledge, his toes dangling into space, and his arms like this. And I'm looking at him going,

I would just, I would just evaporate with fear. My heart would stop.

I mean, it would just be, I couldn't imagine being there. The thought of being so high up on such a small ledge. How do you get down? How do you go up? I'm stuck. It'd be terrible.

You'd feel overwhelmed. Out of control. When you feel overwhelmed, out of control, you feel fear, right? And for most human beings, one of the most fearful, overwhelming things is when another human being looks at you and thinks, you're disgusting, out of my sight. That's the worst thing most of

us can imagine. While we spend all of our time

manicuring our appearance, when you're in college and high school,

you're so careful making sure you've got the right shoes, the

right trousers, and the right T-shirt, and the right hairstyle. God forbid people think you're

a dweeb and say, out of my sight. That's the worst thing we can

imagine. But there's something worse. To be in the presence

of the maker of men and have him look down at us and say,

out of my sight. And when the disciples, when

people in Mark's gospel finally realize who Jesus is, it changes

the way they see everything. They feel frightened, not because

he is so terrible, but because he's so just overwhelming. Like we stand in the night sky

and look up at the stars, and sometimes I imagine myself like

gravity being reversed and me falling up into the universe,

and I feel kind of overwhelmed. I want to run inside. That way

the worst, hit the ceiling, that's the worst you can do. But outside,

if you were sucked up into the heavens, you'd go forever. And

the thought of that's overwhelming, right? You feel overwhelmed, none of your depth, none of your control. And it's an uncanny feeling.

And to be in the presence of God and of his son is just like

that. And when people realize who Jesus

is, it changes the way they see everything and everyone else

in the world. And the Bible's word for that

is fear. When you finally grasp who Jesus

is, it changes the way you see everything. Has that happened

to you? When you see Christ and his expectations,

that he's faithful when you least expect it. He always keeps his

promises. He's merciful when you least

deserve it. And he's fearful when you finally grasp it. There's

a beautiful footnote in Calvin's Institutes. It's my favorite Calvin quote. The gist of true piety does not consist in a fear that would gladly flee the judgment of God. but rather in a pure and true zeal, which loves God altogether as Father, reveres Him truly as Lord, embraces His justice, and dreads to offend Him more than to die. That's the fear that Mark is speaking of. And you know, he leaves you with that in his gospel, if these indeed are the last words of the gospel, With this note of fear, the risen Christ is coming to meet these women, and they feel more than a little bit unnerved. End of story. And then Marx looks at you and says, you know, the risen Christ is coming to meet you also one day, if not in the heavens, when you die. How do you feel about that? Because there's no refuge from him. There's only refuge in him. Come to him today, and you'll find him faithful when you least expect it, merciful when you least deserve it, and fearful when you finally grasp it. And it'll change the way you live your life, the way you spend your money, the way you love your wife, your husband, your children. It'll change everything. from darkness to light, deadness to life, and emptiness to fullness. You know, I heard this great quote from an African pastor. I'll leave you with this this morning. You read it so don't mess it up. The world offers promises full of emptiness. The world offers promises full of emptiness. He who dies with the most toys wins. No, he who dies with the most toys dies. The world offers promises full of emptiness. Christ offers emptiness full of promise. The empty tomb, his empty tomb, your empty tomb, everlasting glory. The world offers promises full of emptiness. Christ offers emptiness full of promise. Happy Easter. He is risen. He is risen indeed. Amen. Let's pray. Father in heaven, we thank you for your mercies this morning, that your word can come through, even the croaky voice. of a weary pastor, pray that it will do good to the souls of all who heard, creating faith where there was none, life where there was none, light where there was none, hope where there was none, and strength where there was none. We might mount up with wings like eagles and run and not be weary and walk and not be faint in the ways of the Lord. For Jesus' sake we pray.