

he is not here

Mark 16:1-8

April 16, 2006

Finally, they had him where they wanted him: stretched out on a stone cold slab, stone cold dead; sealed off from the rest of the world with a huge stone rolled across the entrance to the tomb; out of sight, out of mind, and, best of all, completely silent! No more worrying about what he might say next.

Of course, he had been silent at the trial, saying nothing in response to all the accusations brought against him, offering no defense. But that was out of character. Usually he had something to say, usually something they didn't want to hear.

He had a way of pushing their buttons, of finding their points of vulnerability, and, most annoying, of pricking their consciences. He saw through their righteous facades; he probed the depths of their souls. He exposed their hypocrisies, their prejudices, their pride.

He used their own laws against them, contrasting their careful attention to the letter of the law to their glaring violations of its spirit. He challenged the veracity of their faith, questioning whether they really believed God capable of doing ... anything!

He dared -- dared! -- to speak of God in intimate terms, as if God could be known in person, as if God could be engaged in conversation, as if God cared about him as a beloved son. And he told other people they should expect the same from God! And the people he told! Prostitutes and tax collectors, lepers and Samaritans, beggars and women!

He stirred up the masses, unreasonably raising their hopes, unrealistically encouraging their expectations, turning the social order upside down. Things were getting out of hand.

Their authority was being called into question. Their ability to keep order was being undermined. Their freedom to pursue a quiet and comfortable existence was being threatened. And all because of what this one man was saying!

But now they didn't have to worry anymore. Now they had him where they wanted him. Now they knew right where he was, right where he would always be, He was right here ... right here in this tomb!

But ... *he is not here!*

It is not always his enemies, but sometimes his friends too that try to keep Jesus right where they want him. Not just them, but us, too.

We call ourselves followers of Jesus, but we really expect Jesus to follow us, to go where we want to go, providing us help and protection and reassurance along the way.

We want him to make us feel good about ourselves. We want him to assure us that we are saved. We want him to smooth the path ahead of us and eliminate any obstacles that should happen to get in our way ... obstacles like annoying people or difficult people or threatening people, people too disagreeable or people too needy or people too, well, different.

We decide what Jesus' message really is, we decide who Jesus really is, and we put it and him in a box. There he is: our savior, our comforter, our teacher, our friend.

And as long as we keep him there, in that box, we can happily ignore anything that is outside the box. We don't need to listen to anything that might upset us, anything that might call into question our priorities, anything that might challenge our accustomed lifestyles, anything that might ask us to look at things from a different perspective, anything that might invite us to places we don't really want to go, anything that might introduce us to people we don't really want to know. We keep Jesus right where we want him, right here.

But ... *he is not here. He has been raised!*