

Sermon Title: **“After the Empty Tomb”**

Bible: **Mark 16:1-8 & 1 Corinthians 15:1-11**

When: on Easter Sunday, March 31, 2024

Where: about 25 people (plus YouTube viewers) at Gilroy UMC

Opening Prayer

O Lord, let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts, be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock, and our Redeemer. Amen.

1. After the Empty Tomb

Today’s Gospel of Mark ends with the story of the empty tomb. Actually, there are three different endings to the Gospel of Mark. But as we read, the Gospel of Mark ends at verse 8. And there is no mention about the appearance of the resurrected Jesus. It just ends with fear, shock, and amazement. In other Gospels, the resurrected Jesus appears to his disciples, followers, and many, as we read in first Corinthians. But in the shortest ending to Mark, it tells us of just the empty tomb. But is the empty tomb a real ending to the story?

Have you been to the Monarch Grove Sanctuary in Pacific Grove before? If so, have you seen a lot of butterflies? I have been there, but it was not at the right time, so I just saw only a few butterflies. Have you seen the baby butterflies? Are there any baby butterflies? No, there is no baby butterfly. The caterpillar comes out of the egg, and the caterpillar disappears into a chrysalis, and it seems dead. But later it emerges as a more beautiful and powerful creature, which is a butterfly, and it is an adult butterfly. So, to the Christians, the butterfly has become

a reminder of the resurrection, and the new life. When you were at the Monarch Grove Sanctuary, did you see any empty chrysalises? And we know that the empty chrysalis is not the end of the story.

I was a country boy in Korea. To me, a silkworm moth is more familiar than a butterfly. Silkworm moths are similar to butterflies, but they are different. My biggest uncle had a greenhouse for keeping silkworms in order to produce silk. When a silkworm disappears into a cocoon, it seems dead. But it is not. It turns out to be a silkworm moth. But it leaves the empty cocoon behind, and we use it as the source of the silk. The empty cocoon is not the end of the story.

How about eggs? Many churches celebrate Easter Sunday with egg hunts. When you see the empty eggs, is that the end of the story? We might think of the egg frying at breakfast, but when we see the hatching eggs, the broken and empty eggs, in the nest, we know that the empty eggs are not the end of the story, right?

Maybe, the author of the Gospel of Mark did not need to share the story of the resurrection and the appearance of the resurrected Jesus, because they already knew the meaning of the empty tomb. The empty tomb is not the end of the story, but the beginning of the story.

2. The Grace of the Resurrection

The second reading is from the first Corinthians. The Apostle Paul wrote this to the Corinthian church, and he shared how the resurrected Jesus appeared to him as well as to many disciples. Because of the resurrected Jesus, the Apostle Paul had been changed. He

used to be Saul, the one who persecuted the early Christians. He was the enemy of the church. But thanks to the grace of the resurrected Jesus, he became the most influential church leader. It is amazing, right? But what surprised me is not Paul's conversion, but the early church's forgiveness and acceptance toward Paul. If you were early Christians at that time, could you have accepted Paul, who might have persecuted your sisters and brothers? Thanks to the grace of the resurrected Jesus Christ, there was no more hatred, but repentance, forgiveness, acceptance, and love.

One of my favorite theologians, Jürgen Moltmann, had a similar experience. He is a German and was born in 1926. During World War II, he was drafted into the military service and he became a soldier in the German Army. We know what it meant to be a German soldier during World War II. He became a prisoner of war, and was moved from camp to camp. There in a camp, he met a group of Christians. In his book, "The Source of Life," he shared a hesitation and fear to go to church. During World War II, he was not only a German, but a prisoner of war. He used to be a German soldier. But he was accepted by the group of Christians slowly and gradually. Later he confessed, "I did not find Christ, Christ found me." He is still alive and one of the greatest German Reformed theologians. In my understanding, the reason why he became a great theologian is that there was no hatred, but forgiveness and acceptance, throughout his life, even during and after World War II.

Hatred cannot be the end of the story. There is love. Darkness cannot be the end of the story. There is light. Death is not the end of the story. There is a life, a new life. The empty tomb is

not the end of the story. There is the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. His resurrection is our resurrection! His victory is our victory.

One of the privileges that I have as a pastor, and one of the privileges that we have as a church and Christians is to celebrate the life of our church members, families, and friends. To say good-bye to our loved ones is not easy. It might leave us with many holes. They might seem like empty places in our hearts, minds, and lives that nothing and no one can replace, except our loved ones. The empty chrysalis, the empty cocoons, the empty eggs, the empty tomb, and the empty holes in our hearts are not the end of the story. We have a hope after all of these, because our Lord Jesus Christ is risen. And our beloved ones will rise up and we will rise up together. So, on this Easter Sunday, let us rejoice! Let us shout out! Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Closing Prayer

The resurrected, loving, and living God, thank you so much for the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Thanks to his resurrection, we are joyful and we have a hope over death, beyond darkness. And we can love one another beyond hatred. Please be with us and guide us with the grace and power of the resurrection! In Jesus' name. Amen.