

Time of Grace Ministry  
**Believe It! Tell It!**  
February 19, 2012  
Mark 16:9-16

Have you ever heard of the urban legend, of the face of bloody Mary in the mirror?

Have you ever heard the phrase “urban legends?” Sometimes, back in the day, they used to be called “old wives’ tales,” but that’s very politically incorrect. For one thing, it’s ageism – it seems to imply that if somebody is old that you’ve lost it and you’re senile, when usually the reverse is true. There is great wisdom among the senior citizens. And then to say it’s a wives’ tale, that’s male chauvinism, implying that there might be something weak about women’s brains. So that phrase should not be used anymore.

But urban legends is kind of the new way to refer to it, and an urban legend – and not necessarily to pick on cities as being more gullible – but the concept is that there are stories that people circulate that have an oral tradition. They take on a life of their own, and they’re impossible to stamp out, and somehow they get really widespread so that lots of people know about it and believe it, even though it has no basis in fact.

One of them is – somehow – the message has gotten around to teenage girls, or pre-teen girls (like middle school aged girls) when they stay overnight at each other’s house and have what they used to call a slumber party. Somehow the talk is that if you turn off all the lights in your house, it’s totally dark, and then you go into the bathroom in the middle of the night and you say “bloody Mary” real fast, thirteen times, and if you look around you’ll see her face – this woman of wild hair and blood on her face – you’ll see her image in the mirror. Now the fact that that never happened does not dent the popularity and the long life of that urban legend.

Or another one is, I don’t know if you’ve ever seen the logo of Proctor and Gamble, P&G, the huge company in Cincinnati that makes household products. You’ve probably got twenty P&G products in your house right now. They make everything from floor wax to cleaners, and all kinds of stuff. Well, this company has been around since before the Civil War, and they have a logo of a man in the moon looking at thirteen stars. And somehow the urban legend got started that P&G was really a Satanist conspiracy and that it’s proved by the logo that they have because that’s really the face of the devil.

Well, that’s absurd. The thirteen stars was a very popular image or symbol to use. It’s an homage to the thirteen colonies. Our own national symbols have thirteen to represent the original thirteen colonies. But no matter how hard the people of Proctor and Gamble try – their PR people – they just cannot stamp out that legend. And people keep talking and saying that Proctor and Gamble is a Satanist front; or that the company is a front for the Satanist conspiracy. No matter how absurd that sounds the legend will just not go away.

Or the one about the woman with the big hair; that some woman teased and ratted up her hair and somehow spiders got in there and built a nest and laid eggs and that deadly spiders crawled out and bit her and killed her. Well, that never happened. There’s zero evidence for that ever

happening, but the story keeps getting told and told and retold, over and over again. That phenomenon of an oral tradition that people believe that's not based in fact just keeps on going.

Now my interest in this and the reason I'm kind of exploring this concept with you is to explore how it is and why you believe what you believe. Where does the content of your religious faith come from? And where does the authority come from? What do you believe, in other words, and why do you believe it? And so I'd like to dig in to the last chapter of the book of Mark with you today, and I'd like to examine both some rumors that were going around that in fact were not true, but also the truth – as it came to be revealed – the truth which actually was true, but people had a terrible time believing in it.

You see, God reveals the information that you need to be right with him, to replace your sin with his righteousness; to replace your mortality – the dying nature of your physical body – and replace it with Christ's immortality. But the way in which that information is communicated to you might just sound to some like an urban legend, and some people today find it hard to believe, and so they don't believe it. But also some people, even back where they were friends of the eyewitnesses of the risen Christ, had trouble believing in it, as well.

Satan is trying to mess up the communication process to make you doubt, or lead you to doubt, what you know to be the truth. But he's also substituting urban legends – urban religious legends – to clutter up your faith and inspire you and try to fool you into believing the wrong things.

Let's go into the Word and have a look ourselves.

One of the extraordinary occurrences at the time of the resurrection of Jesus Christ was that no matter what was demonstrated to people, or told to them, one of the human responses to the resurrection was disbelief.

Dig out your Bible with me today and go to the gospel of St. Mark 16; I want you to see this for yourself. It also explains why YOU have difficulty believing these things. You're fighting against a formidable adversary who can make lies look believable, but also make the truth look unbelievable. And this isn't just... like, we're not having a little sociology discussion here or a little philosophy debate, or like a diet debate – like the vegans and the meat eaters are going to go at it and have a little debate. Or have a little political debate about whether socialism or capitalism is a finer method of setting values to things and determining prices. This is life or death! What you make of this message will determine where you spend your eternity. It's important also because you have the ability to be involved in the eternity of other people, in your life.

But if you would turn with me to Mark 16, our story today begins at verse nine. It says, "When Jesus rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene;" that means Mary of Magdala. Magdalena, or Maggie, wasn't her middle name. It has become a name; it's kind of funny, but that was just her town where she was from. "Out of whom he had driven seven demons." Did you know that about Mary? Isn't that something? No wonder she so tirelessly would go around organizing support services for the traveling seminary. Man, if

somebody set me free from Satan, I'd crawl around Judea on my hands and knees in gratitude for the rest of my life; and she was happy to do it.

“She went and told those who had been with him who were mourning and weeping.” Yeah, I guess they would be. You would be weeping, too. “When they heard that Jesus was alive and that she had seen him, they...” what? “Did not believe it.” “Nah! That’s an urban legend. Nah, you’re hallucinating. You just think you saw; you imagined it. Your mind is playing tricks on you. You wished it were so and so you imagined it in your mind. It didn’t really happen.”

“Afterward Jesus appeared in a different form to two of them while they were walking in the country,” toward the little village of – you know the name. They were walking in the country toward the little village of Emmaus. “These returned and reported it to the rest but,” err – “they did not believe him either.” “Oh, you just imagined that you saw him. You’re tripping; you didn’t really see him.”

“Later Jesus appeared to the Eleven as they were eating.” He came in person! “He rebuked them for their lack of faith and their stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen him after he had risen.” And then he said, “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation, because whoever believes and is baptized will be saved. Whoever does not believe is headed for condemnation.”

There’s more interesting stuff, but let’s just pause there and kind of chew on that a little bit. What a mouthful! I hardly know where to start unpacking all of that because it’s so us. You have trouble believing it, don’t you? We’re all Thomas’s – “Nah, that can’t really be.” We’re doubters. Nah, that can’t really be. When I pray, is he really listening? Ah, I don’t know, I might just be making noise. Can he hear? Does he care? Is he there? Is anybody even – who does this sound like: “Is there anybody out there?” All you Floyd fans can resonate with that. Is there anybody listening when I pray, or am I just making noises to comfort my own self? Does God interact with the human race? Is he still engaged or has he lost interest and drifted off? Are we on our own here? Is this it? Are we just trying not to kill each other and just trying to scratch out an existence? Is there meaning here?

You live in a world where there is no God. You have to work and earn your living – most of you do – in a world where there is no acknowledgment of a Creator, where we evolved out of our own slime. We evolved and built ourselves. Most of you have to live in a world where there’s no purpose to your existence. You’re just here and you have to muddle through it and figure it out for yourself. You live in a world that’s gone completely relativistic as far as morality. There no longer are universal principles of right and wrong that apply to everybody. You live in a world where you can make up your own morality. Therefore, I no longer am bound by the old Commandments about not stealing. If I can get away with it, then it’s fine! If nobody catches me then it isn’t a crime – you know what I’m saying? If the tree falls in the forest and nobody hears it, did it happen? Maybe not. If I steal something and nobody saw, did it happen? Maybe not. That’s the world we live in!

We live in a world where every funeral looks final. The living thing drops over – dies in bed or tips over or goes to the hospital and expires and never moves again and the body begins to disintegrate. To the evidence of our eyes it looks like gone forever. Jesus says, “I’m alive, and

all who trust and believe in me will live, too. I'm alive; therefore you can trust that the forgiveness of your sins was accomplished and that your accounts have indeed been paid in God's court. I'm alive, which guarantees the engagement and involvement of my Father in the world, for I surrendered to death trusting that he would lift me out of the pit." A thousand years before Easter, David, in Psalm 16, spoke Jesus' words when he said, "You will not allow your holy one to see decay." I can go down in the pit knowing that you will bring me out. But this becomes activated through faith.

The absolutely critically important role of the faith in your heart, the knowledge you have, and the faith to grasp it and trust in it is shown us in Jesus' words in verse 16: "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, whoever does not believe will be condemned." Our baptism is our initiation into the Christian faith; it announces to us the forgiveness of sins through Christ our Savior, and implants the Holy Spirit to begin that renewal process.

Faith is everything! It is not your deeds that make you worthy before God, for they're all too few and all too faint. It's faith in Christ which enables you to claim the holy deeds of Jesus Christ as though they were your own. That's what makes you smell good before God. That's what makes you shine like a righteous woman or a righteous man. It's faith that matters, and so the lack of faith in his disciples was a major problem for Jesus! But here is the amazing thing: He stuck with them! He didn't give up.

I am blown away by this. It just makes me love Jesus all the more, when I realize that he sticks with people who are so flawed. Not only did he have a problem with them as individuals because they weren't believing the evidence that he was presenting to them, but these men were going to be the leaders in his sales force. These men were going to be the leaders in trying to persuade other people to believe the evidence of the eyewitnesses and the ear witnesses and to tell what they had seen.

This was a huge problem for our Savior! Look what he said to them on this great big day, this huge day of victory. He rebuked them for their lack of faith and their stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen him after he had risen. And yet, he stuck with them, just like Jesus stuck with Adam and Eve after they had rebelled. He didn't throw them away and just say, "Well, go to hell. To hell with you, and I'm going to start over and make a better class of people." He stayed with them and rehabilitated them and restored them and made them useful again.

I personally am so encouraged by that. I am so glad that Jesus doesn't throw me away either when I have sinned. And what a relief it must come to you that Jesus stays with you, and even when you have some setbacks and even when you personally have some failures – moral failures, or life or behavior failures – he doesn't throw you away, but he comes back and is interested in restoring and rehabilitating. That, of all the things to love about Jesus, that's got to be in the top three – that he sticks with us. And he stuck with his wavering, shaky disciples, as well.

And so when he saw their weakness of faith, he knew "You need to be shored up," and so he taught them again. "When you believe in me, you are saved. That means you will be able to reenact my life in everything important. That means you – as I have crushed Satan – you also share in the victory over the devil. As I have defeated death and risen from the grave, you also

are victors over the grave and victors and conquerors of death itself. You're immortal like me, and because I am on my way to heaven to take my rightful place at the side of my Father, you also are immortal. You also are now heaven-bound." Those are the promises that are bound up in the concept of being saved, and it comes by faith. So knowing what to believe, knowing why you believe those things, and knowing the content and grasping them and trusting them with your heart is so important.

It's important also because they were going to represent Jesus. He not only said, "Believe the message, but I also want you to tell it!" What good on earth is a sales force that does not believe in the product? Isn't that crazy? Just suppose you're at an appliance store and you're looking at this big wall of TVs and you're kind of looking longingly at this huge big screen on the wall and you're having fantasies about what football is going to look like when you're sitting on the couch and watching that bad boy. And you're thinking, "Oh man, ohhh, ohhh." And you're getting real close to whipping out that plastic and making the purchase and the sales guy comes over and he says, "Well, what do you think?" And you say, "Man, do people like this one? Is this one of your big selling models?" And he looks at it and goes, "Well, I don't know. I've heard some bad things about it. I don't know that that's even going to make it to the end of the first year on the warranty."

Would that close a deal on a sale? If a sales clerk does not believe in his product he's worthless! What good do you think are people representing Christ who are really iffy or unbelieving about the content of the message? No use at all. But this is so astounding to me! They were so weak and Jesus said, "I want you to come and work for me and share it with the world," and he kept coming back to them and bringing them additional spiritual strength so that they could believe the unbelievable; that a dead thing came back to life. You've never seen that happen, but God invites you to gamble everything on the truth of what some think is nothing but an urban legend, or an old husbands' tale.

"Go and tell and preach good news to all creation." That's a terrible word – preach. It is not a very good translation. I'm not sure which version of the Bible you like to use but the Greek word that's behind it, "kerusso," just means to be a herald. Just means to be a representative – to represent. And I don't like that word "preach" because it implies that that's something that pastors do and so, well, somebody really ought to preach to all creation. I will clap and cheer for you; maybe I'll read some mission newsletters and I might throw you a few dollars, but somebody ought to do something about that. That isn't talking about just the clergy; that is talking about all Christians. And as you have been touched by faith and your faith has been grown by the Word; as you become convinced "There is forgiveness of sins for me, and it's GIVEN to me..." As you become convinced, "I am immortal because Jesus is immortal. I have nothing to fear from the grave because that has only become a doorway for me to see the one who loves me more than anybody else in all creation loves me..." That's what that means.

And to be a herald is not something that belongs to the clergy. We're just your coaches and helpers. You have ministries in your life of places and people I will never get to; people I will never know. There are people who trust you that may never trust me. There are people you know that I will never know. There are places where you have influence that I will never have influence. You are part of the field rep force of Jesus Christ to share good news. That same world you live in and work in and study in or maybe are retired in, where there are people who

view the world as just having evolved hap-hazzardly and undirectedly without design into the way the human race is today; have no accountability to a God; fearful to die; sad that you lose everything when you die. There's a lot of sadness and a lot of pointless, meaningless living going on – you have the answers! And when you speak God's words it has as much power as if I speak them, because the power doesn't come from me. Whatever is truth is true because God has said it, and he packs his power behind it.

*That* is what changes unbelief to belief; from doubt into faith. From guilt into forgiveness; from dying depression into joyful anticipation of immortality. Jesus said, "I work with broken people." He said, "But don't get ahead of me. Stay here in Jerusalem and wait until I come." He brought game on Pentecost; when he brought the Holy Spirit and poured into them what they needed to fit them for this amazing task of spreading the gospel. But that isn't a clergy thing, it is a people thing. It is all God's people, and every one of you has good news to share in a way that sounds authentic to you and among circles where you have influence. And this is how the good news is passed on.

Forgiveness of sins and immortality are conveyed from one human being to another by talk; by ink on a page and by talk. It looks weak, doesn't it? It looks like just more urban legends, but it's true. So realize what you're up against: an enemy in hell who would like you to believe a bunch of nonsense. Whether it's spiders and big hair or Bloody Mary showing up in a mirror or Satanism at P&G, there will be that kind of stuff going around aplenty, and you've probably bought into all kinds of dumb stuff in your life. Maybe some of them you've figured out, maybe some foolish things you still believe in. But there also is truth going around that is a life or death matter for you, in terms of what you make of that information.

With all my heart I invite and challenge you to grab onto it and believe it – with all your heart. And then whether or not you think you're a total stud at evangelism, you already know enough to share with fearful, dying people around you. Be proud of Jesus and share the Word, and let his Word convince people they're loved by God and have a promise and hope of immortality with him in heaven.

This is good news for God's people. Let God's people say, "Amen."

Can I pray with you today? As we think about the importance of faith, let's call on God. He, after all, is the one – the only one – who can create and sustain saving faith in our hearts. Let's go to him in prayer.

"Heavenly Father, it is you that created faith. It is you who have brought us to Christ Jesus in the first place. We wouldn't even be gathered around your Word if you had not first helped us to listen and believe the message for the first time. It is you whose power has converted us. Holy Spirit, it is you who authored the wonderful Word, the gospel of our Savior Jesus, that brings us life. We give you praise! And Jesus, you are the star of the story. It is your Word that we need, and the message and Word about your work is what saves us. Help us to believe even more strongly. Feed our faith with your wonderful Word so that we believe it and tell it. In your name we pray, Amen."

For Time of Grace, I'm Pastor Mark Jeske, reminding you that every day is a day of grace for you.



# Grace Notes

## Guides for Personal Bible Study

### Believe It! Tell It!

**Mark 16:9-16:** When Jesus rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had driven seven demons. She went and told those who had been with him and who were mourning and weeping. When they heard that Jesus was alive and that she had seen him, they did not believe it. Afterward Jesus appeared in a different form to two of them while they were walking in the country. These returned and reported it to the rest; but they did not believe them either. Later 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. He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.

#### Points to Ponder

- It is a feature of the weakness of the human brain to keep on believing and spreading a story that has been thoroughly disproven. What is even worse is to refuse to believe the truth even when it has been thoroughly established. Read Mark 16:9-16 and underline every reference to unbelief among Jesus’ friends.
- Jesus rebuked his disciples for their lack of faith and then promptly drafted them into his army of resurrection messengers. What guidance and comfort do you draw from that fact for your own life?
- Which two “conditions” are necessary to be saved and to live eternally with Christ? Which one condition condemns a person? Note that the lack of having been baptized is not mentioned as a cause of damnation. We will let God sort that out. It’s our job to baptize everyone we can.
- Name three things that hold you back from sharing the resurrection story more joyfully and freely with people in your life.
- Is the resurrection that Jesus promised you a resurrection of the soul only or the body too?

#### The Bottom Line

After Jesus rose from the dead, despite many eye witnesses and Jesus’ own testimony, many of the disciples had a tough time believing he was truly alive. We today often have the same doubts despite what God tells us in his Word. The devil loves to take advantage of those doubts. Just as Jesus stuck with his disciples during their times of doubt and commissioned them to share the Good News with the world, he does the same for us.

*You can dig deeper into your Bible by reading more about these truths from the lesson:*

- Eyewitness Testimony! Matthew 28:9,10; Luke 24:13-15,33,34; John 20:18; 1 Corinthians 15:5-8
- Do Not Doubt! Proverbs 3:5; Matthew 14:31; Mark 5:36; Mark 11:23; James 1:6
- Believe and Be Saved! John 3:16; John 5:24; John 6:35; Acts 16:31; Ephesians 2:8,9