April 4, 10 Mark 16:1-8

COME TOUCH HIS ROBE:

THE DEVIL THOUGHT HE WON

There he was lighting up his cigar again. Oh this was the time when smoking was allowed during sporting events. During most basketball games when the game was in hand, when his team was ahead by enough points, when time was running out on their opponents, Red Aurbach, coach of the Boston Celtics years ago, would reach in his pocket pull out a big cigar, smile, take out his lighter, light it, take a few puffs and blow smoke rings in honor of his team winning that game. He did it at ever game. It became his signature for many years. In fact when he stopped coaching and was sitting in the stands or in his box at Boston Garden or the new place, when the team was about to win he would take out a cigar and light up. When the game was close and you were on pins and needles and you weren't sure if the Celtics were going to win you just glanced toward the bench or the stands to find Red and if you saw puffs of smoke coming from that area you knew Red had lit one and there was no need to worry, the game was well in hand.

On the Friday we call Good Friday, when they finally took Jesus down from the cross they hurriedly prepared his body for a quick burial. Joseph and Nicodemus and a few others hastily took care the best they could, laid him in the tomb that belonged to Joseph, watched the soldiers roll the stone into the grove

that would keep anyone from rolling it out very easily. The Roman soldiers and some of Herod's court guards were given instructions to seal the tomb to make sure no one messed with it. They were to stay and guard that tomb with their lives. No one would be allowed close to it. They were not to take time to sleep. They were to guard it as if their lives depended upon it. In fact it did. For if they failed, and someone came and stole the body they would pay a high price for letting it happen. It would cost them their lives. So aware of all this, they placed guards around the tomb and they waited and they watched.

Meanwhile, guess who was watching with them, watching to make sure it was Jesus they put in the tomb, watching to make sure they rolled the stone in place, sealed it tightly, and began their watch. He watched to make sure none of Jesus' disciples or friends were around. He watched as the soldiers kept the women at bay. He watched and he smiled. Who was that? None other than that slimy mean old slippery serpent we know as Satan. If they had looked hard enough that Friday night perhaps the guards would have seen they were not alone for sitting on the top of the stone was none other than that rascal smoking his victory cigar. He began to light his victory cigar the moment Jesus took his final breath when he said his final words, "It is finished" and bowed his head and gave up his spirit. He had lit many a cigar when other believers foolishly went to their graves believing the stories of salvation. Why, after he and Adam and Eve were expelled

from the garden that time he smiled and lit one thinking this was his finest hour because sin entered the world. But this, yes this time, this was his finest hour. Satan had it all planned out and it was working. Betrayals, denials, running scared disciples, a mockery of a trial, influencing a crowd to have a no good criminal released instead of Jesus. Satan remembers the time when he offered Jesus the world if he would bow down and worship him. It didn't have to be this way. In the wilderness after those 40 days Satan offered him food, protection and his kingdom. But Jesus refused all three. Jesus said, "Get going Satan. I don't need you I have my Father. He rules the world. You, you just area fallen angel with big thoughts. You are doomed. Be gone." So he left….for a time such as this.

Now 3 odd years later it didn't matter anymore. Satan had won. He got others to do his dirty trick. He got others to turn their backs on Jesus. He got others not to believe what they saw. And those miracles? Well they happen to some, but not to all, and not to you. So don't be taken in by Jesus' words. They are only words that sound good, but well, you know when you're dead, you're dead, so stop thinking about some pipe dream of eternal life where all things will be great.

But folks, let me interject right here that that was Friday and Sunday was coming. Praise God for Sunday.

So Satan sits on the stone smoking his victory cigars one after the other. He lights up Friday evening when they lay him in the tomb. He lights up one on

Saturday as the guards stand at their post making sure no one comes near to steal his body. No one comes. It's kind of dull for the soldiers much to the delight of that character in the red suit with that long tail and a pitch fork.

Now it's early Sunday morning. The dew is still on the ground and the sun is beginning to peak over the hill. It looks like it will be a beautiful day. Satan smiles as he thinks this is his day. He lights another cigar when he spots the women coming to the tomb early Sunday morning. He smiles as he sees the two Mary's and Salome coming with spices to anoint Jesus' body. He smiles in his victory.

But then something happens. The next thing you know a messenger from God comes to sit beside Satan on that stone and they begin to chat. Satan asks what he is doing there and the messenger said he would see in just a few minutes. Satan told the messenger this was a fine day for he had won his battle with God for his one last plan lay there in the tomb dead. The messenger smiled and said, "It is a great day. This is the day the Lord has made. " And as the women came closer there was a rumble like something moving. The next thing Satan knew was the stone they were perched on began to move. While Satan grasped for his balance with a look of fright on his face, falling to the ground, the angel just smiled as the stone rolled away to reveal the tomb where Jesus was buried. Satan lay on the ground his cigar beside him. He was flabbergasted. What was going on, he wondered. By then the woman were just about there seeing that they need not

worry who would roll away the stone, for they could see it had been rolled away. Satan's curiosity got the best of him as he was the first to look into the tomb. That victory cigar he was smoking fell from his lips as his mouth opened wide as his eyes spied the empty grave clothing, but no Jesus, no body. But how could this be? He searched and searched to see if he could find an exit, but there was none. The only entrance and exit was through that hole that was sealed with that stone. No one could escape. No one could have taken his body for the soldiers were there all this time. In fact he was there all that time. How could this be? He looked at the smiling messenger and said "what did you do?" The messenger said, "It wasn't me. It was God. You'll see in just a few moments when the women get here."

And the women seeing the stone rolled away ran to the tomb, went in, saw it was empty, came out not knowing what to think, or do or say, thinking someone must have beat them to the grave and stole Jesus' body, saw someone, heard a voice say, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? You are looking for Jesus. He is not here, he has risen." The women were in awe as they looked at one another. They didn't know what to do. They shook with fear thinking no one would believe them. They were told to go tell the disciples what they found, the stone rolled away, the empty tomb, and a messenger telling them he was not there, that he had risen and will join them very soon.

Satan knew he had lost the final battle. God had won. And ever since that time Satan has tried over and over again to get people like you and me not to believe the story of the resurrection. He tried to persuade the Jewish leaders to let the Roman soldiers off free if they told the story that some of Jesus' disciples came and stole his body. And so Satan continues to this day to try and destroy the story.

But folks, for over 2000 years the story remains the same. The grave is still empty. During that time many witnesses testified to his rising. Not only the women, but the disciples, others who were raised, why 2 men on the way to Emmaus walked and talked with him and he broke bread in their home before he vanished. Later Paul met Jesus on the road to Damascus. And throughout the years people have met Jesus in various places. In hospital rooms, in emergency rooms, in weddings, at the birth of a child, at other celebrations, at baptisms, at confirmation, at joining a church, at an altar of grace. I met him during a Bible study when he called me into his ministry.

The stone was rolled away not to let Jesus out, but to let us in to see he was not there, for he has risen. And if God or Jesus were people who smoked I could see them now sitting on the rolled away stone giving each other high fives, lighting up their victory cigars saying to each other, "Dad, well done." Perhaps His Father said, "Jesus, I'm proud of what you accomplished so far. The war is over, but we have many to convince. Let's get back to work. Let's keep that sneaky fellow in

hand. Many more are out there that need to hear the story and receive you as Savior and Lord. Well done, Son. Well done."

Up from the grave he arose with a mighty triumph over his foes. He arose a victor from the dark domain and he lives forever with the saints to reign. He arose! He arose! Hallelujah Christ arose.

Friday was a down day. Thank God, literally for Sundays when we remember he has risen and is alive.

Happy Easter….Christ is alive!