

(Mark 16:1–8 NRSV) When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. {2} And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. {3} They had been saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" {4} When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. {5} As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. {6} But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. {7} But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you." {8} So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

A recent article in The Washington Post carried the headline: "Astronomers Find Massive Void."

It went on to talk about how astronomers have found an enormous hole in the Universe, nearly a billion light-years across, empty of both normal matter such as stars, galaxies, and gas, and the mysterious, unseen "dark matter."

While earlier studies have shown holes, or voids, in the large-scale structure of the Universe, this new discovery dwarfs them all.

"Not only has no one ever found a void this big, but we never even expected to find one this size," said Lawrence Rudnick of the University of Minnesota.

It is hard to imagine anything like this

What makes this vast area of the universe a hole?

The area shows almost no signs of cosmic matter, meaning no stars, planets, solar systems or clouds of cosmic dust. Researchers couldn't even find dark matter, which is invisible but measurable by its gravitational pull. There were also no signs of black holes that might have gobbled up the matter once present in the region.

When I read articles like this --- it makes my head hurt - I cannot get my mind around the massive sizes and ideas that they refer to.

A light year is the distance that light can travel in one year

Now if I remember my science courses from High School - light travels at something like 700 million miles per hour (I think I am a little fast). So a light year is something around six trillion miles.

Our nearest neighboring star is about four light-years away.

That is something like twenty-five trillion miles.

And how about that massive void, that huge cold spot in the sky?

It's between six and 10 billion light-years away from us, and it's nearly a billion light-years across.

A massive void. No planets, no stars, no galaxies, no gases. Absolutely nothing.

Like I said - it makes my head hurt.

But we have come here this morning because of another empty place.

Now I don't know if we have any astronomers here this morning - but we all know of an empty place that has cosmic implications.

We have all heard how on that first Easter morning, Mary Magdalene and two other women encountered a massive void when they showed up at the empty tomb, one that was as mind-boggling as anything at the edge of the universe.

It was early when they arrived, and after meeting a young man and hearing about the resurrection "they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid" (Mark 16:8).

Can you imagine how Mary is feeling at this point?

She has already suffered the crucifixion of her friend and teacher Jesus, and she's mourning his death deeply.

Now she goes to his tomb to pay her respects, and what does she find? Nothing. A huge cold spot. An empty void!

We know what this feels like, don't we?

Each of us, at some time in life, have come face to face with a massive void, a big empty place.

It happens ...

- when you give your heart to someone who doesn't accept the gift
- when you learn a sport, practice hard and still don't make the team
- when you study and pursue a profession, only to find you hate your job
- when you create something beautiful, and discover that no one's interested
- when you try to resist a temptation, but then give in to it again and again
- when you jump to a new job, then lose it in a downsizing
- when you put money into a home, only to see your equity disappear
- when you retire from a long career, and wake up with nothing to do
- when you lose a spouse to cancer, and find yourself all alone in the world.

These are huge cold spots.

Massive voids.

Mary and her companions are seized by terror and amazement, and they retreat into silence, saying nothing to anyone. Their world feels like a billion light-years of empty space. But it's to their everlasting credit that they take some time to ponder this strange set of events, and let the disappearance of Jesus

sink in.

Certainly it is true that the mysterious young man in the tomb has said to them, “Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here” (Mark 16:6).

This is good news — the Easter morning good news of resurrection life. But they cannot grasp it, at least not yet.

For now, it’s all terror, amazement and fear. How can they *not* be alarmed, when they are standing face to face with an empty tomb?

Too often we try to pretend that there are no massive voids in our lives, no empty places.

Sociologist Jean Twenge observes that young adults in particular have been told things such as “believe in yourself and you can do anything” — which really is not very good advice.

The truth is, bad things can happen to good people, and not every goal in life is realistic. You may believe that you’re going to earn a graduate degree and get a great job, along with a perfect family in a beautifully decorated home, but life doesn’t always give you what you want.

Twenge thinks that overblown expectations are largely to blame for the recent rise in anxiety and depression in young adults. She says, “It’s depressing to realize that your unrealistic dreams are never going to come true.”

We’re all going to face some empty places in life, and we need to take them seriously.

You cannot expect to step into a dream job right out of college.

Most of us are going to endure a lot of heartbreak before we find a partner for life.

Loss and rejection are a part of just about every life story you can imagine.

*You've got to pass through some empty tombs on the way to resurrection life.*

Mary and her companions make this journey as they flee from the tomb.

They do not fall into the trap of thinking that if they believe in themselves, they can do anything. Or if they ignore the death of Jesus it will just go away.

Instead, they feel a blast of alarm, terror, amazement and fear — and it is precisely these emotions that set them up for the surprising reality of the resurrection and the possibility of real life.

They quickly discover that Easter is not about them — instead, *it's about God. In particular, it's about God filling the empty places in our lives with new and unexpected life.*

Through the resurrection, God fills the empty places in our lives.

He did it for the first followers of Jesus, . . . and he offers to do it for us.

The good news is that we don't have to earn or deserve this gift of new life.

What we have to do is be willing to follow Jesus into the future he's preparing for us.

Mary and her companions felt a disorienting mixture of amazement and fear on Easter morning, but they responded when the young man gave the command, “[G]o, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you” (Mark 16:7).

If we are willing to follow Jesus into the future some amazing things can happen.

Think again about that enormous empty place that was recently discovered by astronomers.

A gigantic hole, nearly a billion light-years across.

No planets, no stars, no galaxies, no gases — just a huge cold spot.

That space ... is not nearly ... as cavernous ... as a heart ... without God.

About 350 years ago, Blaise Pascal, mathematician, philosopher and physicist, observed that the human heart is like an “infinite abyss.” He discovered that we human beings try in vain to fill our hearts with everything around us — education, jobs, homes, money, friends, family.

But none of these earthly things can help, “since this infinite abyss can be filled only with an infinite and immutable object; in other words by God himself.”

In spite of his brilliance and his contributions to mathematics, Pascal realized that life apart from God is empty.

He found refuge in Jesus Christ alone.

If you are feeling a massive void in your life, the very same will be true for you.

Your emptiness will not be eliminated by a new career, a new spouse, a new house, a new car, a better salary.

Instead, the hole in your life can be filled only by experiencing the resurrection, and following Jesus into the future.

The good news of Easter is that Christ is risen!

He has been raised from the dead, and is waiting for you, beyond whatever emptiness is a part of your life.

Beyond the empty tomb.