

“Don’t Say Nothing.”

Mark 16 : 1-8

About 1930, the Communist leader Bukharin journeyed from Moscow to Kiev. His mission was to address a huge assembly. His subject, atheism. For a solid hour he aimed his heavy artillery at Christianity, hurling argument and ridicule.

At last he finished and from stage he looked out over the crowd at what he was certain was the smoldering ashes of people’s faith. He demanded, “Are there any questions?”

One man in the crowd stood up and asked permission to speak. He mounted the platform and moved close to the guest speaker. The audience was silent as the man stood before them, trembling somewhat -- obviously very nervous about standing next to a Communist Party official sent from the Kremlin.

He surveyed the audience for a moment, looking from right to left. Then he shouted the ancient greeting of the Orthodox Church: “CHRIST IS RISEN!”

The vast assembly rose to their feet and the response came like the sound of thunder: “HE IS RISEN INDEED!”

Easter is about the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and that is NOT something to keep quiet about -- even in the face of militant unbelief and ridicule. Easter is NOT something to keep quiet about, even in the face of a culture that is more interested in being entertained by celebrities than it is in being transformed by God. If we believe that the Easter story is really true, than it ought to be something that we cannot resist talking about.

For many years, Lee Strobel was a reporter for the Chicago Tribune. He was a very good newspaper journalist with an intellectually sharp mind, and with scholarly skills for doing research. He was also an atheist.

One day, Lee set out to debunk the Easter story. Applying his journalistic and legal skills, he set out to prove to the whole world that Jesus really did not rise from the dead. He plunged into his research by interviewing a wide range of biblical scholars, and by accessing a variety of primary sources. He was bound and determined that once he gathered all of the facts together, he would disprove this resurrection myth once and for all. He would also publish his findings in a special section of the Chicago Tribune.

Throughout all of his research, something very interesting happened to

Lee Strobel. As he dug into the historical record, he became convinced that maybe there was something to this resurrection story after all. Once the evidence had all been lined up, he saw that the amount of evidence FOR the resurrection by far outnumbered the evidence that stood AGAINST it.

Lee Strobel now found himself at a crossroads. He realized that if Jesus really is alive, and that if Jesus really is who the Gospel accounts say He is

-- then he, Lee Strobel -- was definitely headed down the wrong road. And what's more, he knew that he didn't like the destination where that road would lead him.

Confronted with the facts that he himself had dug up, Lee knew that he was faced with a decision: He could either accept this Jesus whom he never believed was the Risen Christ but now had become convinced that Jesus really was -- OR -- he could reject Christ altogether and then face the eternal ramifications for THAT decision.

To make a long story short, Lee Strobel the atheist became Lee Strobel the Christian. He wrote a book about research he had done in replicating that initial journey, and the book is entitled: *The Case For Christ*. It is one of the most compelling books I've ever read, and is a book that I would recommend for every thoughtful person who may wonder if there is any truth to this whole Easter thing.

Lee Strobel became convinced that Jesus really did rise from the dead and he refused to keep quiet about it. To this day, he continues to go around telling the whole world! He writes and he publishes; he goes around presenting seminars....all geared towards one goal: Introducing as many people as he can to the Jesus Christ Whom he became convinced, really did rise from the dead and is alive today. Lee Strobel refuses to just say "nothing" about something that he believes to be true!

Let me ask all of you a question -- and I'll phrase it in a really outlandish way: If you had gone to the cemetery and found a grave empty....and an angel nearby who told you that the person was now alive....would you keep quiet about it?

Now granted, you might be fairly freaked out about it -- but would you simply clam up and say nothing to anyone about it?

The three women who went to the tomb early that morning to anoint Jesus' body met up with an angel who told them that Jesus was now alive.

The Gospel of Mark's account ends with these words: "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.” (Mark 16:8)

This is Mark’s account of the story. In Luke’s Gospel it says that the women didn’t believe the angel. Matthew gives a slightly different take on it by saying that the women fled in terror AND in joy -- mixed emotions. Then, John’s Gospel gives a different account altogether. John writes that Jesus shows up alive, but Mary Magdalene mistakes him for the cemetery caretaker.

These are not contradictions -- rather, you have four writers covering the same event. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John each have a slightly different rendering of what happened at the tomb -- but they all agree on the most important point of all: Jesus was raised from the dead.

They might have kept quiet about it for a few minutes -- but fortunately for the whole world, they didn’t say nothing about it for long! Soon, they went and told!

Let’s speculate: What might have happened if the first disciples had kept quiet about the Resurrection? Let’s just suppose that after that first Easter and the 40 days following, they wave good-bye to Jesus on Ascension hill and then they return to life as normal -- never saying anything about Jesus rising from the dead? What would have happened?

Well, I can tell you what would NOT have happened. For one thing, There would have been no New Testament. Not another word would have been written. If those first Christians had kept silent we would have no New Testament, no record of the early Church going forth into the world with the Good News of God’s love in Jesus Christ, no promise in the last book of the Bible that there will come a day when God “will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more.” (Revelation 21:4) Without the Easter message, there would have been no New Testament.

There would have been no Church. There would be no St. Peter’s UCC. We wouldn’t be having Easter breakfast this morning. If those first disciples of Jesus had just said nothing about the Resurrection and kept it under wraps, then there would be no *known* basis for Christianity.

Many undergraduate students have read Thomas Jefferson’s New Testament. (I remember being subjected to it as well!) Jefferson was an outstanding statesman, but he wasn’t a very good theologian. Infected by the popular philosophy of “Deism” of the day, Jefferson went through the New

Testament and snipped out the passages that seemed incredible to him. Nothing supernatural, nothing miraculous remained.

I find Jefferson's version far more incredible than the actual New Testament version! Newton's third law of motion says: "For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction." Well, the Church is the reaction. What was the action? It was the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Think of those first Christians: disillusioned disciples of a discredited Messiah! And suddenly, something happened. They became the nucleus of the greatest spiritual movement the world has ever known. Something happened; and it could not have simply happened in their minds, for they were not going to be convinced except for solid, substantial reasons that Jesus was alive.

Listen to these words: "I accept the resurrection of Easter Sunday not as an invention of the community of disciples, but as a historical event...." The words of a fundamentalist, right? Wrong. They come from Pinchas Lapide, who is a Jewish scholar of the New Testament. He wrote a book entitled *The Resurrection Of Jesus*.

I'll close with this: *If you believe that the Resurrection is true, then don't say 'nothing' -- say SOMETHING!* Tell your friends and family that death and the grave have been conquered! Tell them that there is ultimate hope beyond the grave! Tell them that God does not allow death to have the last word!

What will you do? What will WE do? Are we going to sit around on our hands and keep quiet about it? Are we going to be embarrassed by it? What will we do with the Greatest story ever told? THAT is the question for today.

Jesus Christ has a mission for His church, and I have a feeling that it isn't to keep quiet about Him and make it a purely "personal" matter. When it comes to the Gospel -- Don't say *nothing*.

AMEN.