

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church – March 31, 2013

Easter Sunday - John 20:1-2, 11-18 - **Names of Wondrous Love—THE LIGHT**

Have you ever traveled through a long, dark tunnel like the one pictured on our screen? If you've journeyed the mountain roads of Colorado, you have run into a tunnel or two. What a feeling as you leave the bright sun behind and enter that dimly lit tunnel! Some people feel uneasy, confined, and there are people who even think it's a bit frightening. For those people it is a wonderful sight to see the exit with its brighter light beckoning in the distance! And even better, when you drive out again into the warm sunshine!

The tunnel experience makes a very good illustration for the season of Lent. For some weeks now, we've been in the tunnel of Lent. The hours spent in Lent are often very somber, solemn, and serious ones. I've even heard members express out loud that our Lenten hymns are so dreary. But those hours were important because they drew attention to our sins. They reminded us forcefully of God's anger over those sins and God's death for those sins. Those dark hours sent us home deeply aware of what we had deserved from a holy God and what Christ had to suffer in our place.

But today it's all different. Today we drive out of the Lenten tunnel into the full sunshine, the glorious light of another Easter. For our joy, our comfort, our praise, today we look at one more name of wondrous love for our Savior. For Jesus who was crucified, but now lives again is —**THE LIGHT**.

That first Easter Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, "*while it was still dark,*" our text says. Those words just about described the condition of her heart too. Anyone who has lost a loved one knows something about how she must have felt. Loss, despair, and grief flood the heart, with a loved one gone – not with us on earth anymore. But Mary's darkness went much deeper than that. Remember her past months. Jesus had cured her when he had cast seven devils out of her (Lk 8:2). From then on she had followed him, serving him with full devotion and a heart full of faith in Him as the promised Savior. On this Easter day we might say she had put all of her eggs into one basket and that was that Jesus was the Christ. But then had come the dark hours of the past few days. Not only was the sky over Calvary pitch black as she stood beneath Jesus' cross, so was her heart. Not only was the tomb into which they had hurriedly placed his lifeless body devoid of light, so was her spirit. Despair settled over her soul when they had buried Jesus and with him all her hopes in him as the promised Savior. Imagine the blackness as she sobbed later to Peter and John, "*They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!*"?

Mary was in a tunnel without light, without an exit. That's why the tears came as she stood by his opened tomb. She thought that not only was her Savior dead but now even his body had been stolen. If only she had found his lifeless form still in that grave so that she could embalm it! But now she was denied even that last labor of love. Yes, she came "*while it was still dark,*" not only in the sky but in her soul also.

Is there anyone here today who knows that feeling? Anyone who's wept at a freshly filled grave or who's returned to weep again and again? Anyone who's struggling with life, getting tired of its burdens and weary of its weight? Anyone who's worried about health, loved ones, jobs, the economy, the future? Anyone whose sins just never

seem to go away and whose temptations always seem to win? Anyone who feels shoved into some tunnel without any exit with daylight in sight? Then stick around. Listen and learn as we follow Mary Magdalene from **dark night** into **gray dawn**.

Darkness must yield. Dawn must come. Every day it happens. So also on that first Easter. Look with me a little more closely into our text. Can't you see the dawn coming, just a little gray light at first, but light nonetheless? In the first glimmer of light that day, Mary could see the stone rolled away from the tomb of her Lord.

Just a little thinking and Mary should have known that the disciples would not have cracked open the master's tomb and stolen his body. What would they have had to gain by spreading the lie that Jesus was risen from the dead? Nobody would accept such a ridiculous story. Besides, the disciples were too paralyzed by fear to plan such things.

A little more thinking and she would have known that the enemies had nothing to do with the rolled away stone either. In fact, that was the very thing they were trying so hard to prevent. They had posted an around-the-clock guard and sealed the tomb securely to keep the stone in place. They wanted Jesus still dead in that tomb so that people could start forgetting about him and his claims. They wanted things to settle back to normal again.

The dawn was starting. Easter light was beginning to shine in some darkened souls. Several of the women claimed to have seen the risen Jesus, though few believed their emotional report. They reported angels at the tomb, not only shining in glory but speaking the news that Jesus was no longer dead. Soon others like Peter and the Emmaus disciples breathlessly reported news so wonderful that it was almost unbelievable. Exit from the Lenten tunnel was in sight. Easter light was starting to shine.

Again, anyone here who knows the feeling? Anyone who's walked away from weekend worship feeling good only to have life as usual dim the joy? Anyone here who's learned those Easter lines: ***"I know that my Redeemer lives, what comfort this sweet sentence gives,"*** only to wonder when it's your loved one who's being buried or your grave that's sneaking closer? Anyone who's seen the Easter dawning only to have pain and problem, loss and doubt, like some dense fog shutting out almost all of the Easter light? Then stick around. Listen and learn as we follow Mary from **gray dawn** into morning's **glorious light**.

Dawn doesn't last long. It's only that short period between night and light. So also that first Easter day. Soon the glorious SON appeared and with him all his glorious light. In the dawn Mary had seen the stone rolled away and had run back to report her fears. Later, in the daylight, she had returned to the tomb to weep. Then it happened! As she wept, she turned and noticed a man standing behind her. Through tear-dimmed eyes she didn't recognize him. But when he said, ***"Mary,"*** her heart turned over. ***"Master,"*** she said in amazement. This was her Lord. She was not in error. She had seen them lay his body in the grave, and she recognized him now. Suddenly her tears were dried for her and the weight was lifted from her heart. All past sorrows were gone. Darkness had vanished. Now it was ***"My Savior lives."*** No more tunnel, just the bright light of Easter victory for her.

What a day that had to be for Mary and the others! What wondrous truths his resurrection brought them. No more could sin's guilt hammer them. Their guilt had been laid on Christ and their sins crucified him, but his resurrection was proof positive that he had paid for all those sins. By raising his beloved Son, the Father had plainly shown

Christ's payment was complete. No more could Satan bedevil them because Christ on Calvary had crushed his head. The Savior even descended into hell to show that He had laid the old, evil foe flat in the dust of defeat. No more could death hold them. Christ had entered his grave and exited to show that because he lives, they also would live. These wondrous truths, sealed by their Savior's resurrection, filled their days with glorious life and their deaths with victory.

Anyone here who knows the feeling? I hope so. I pray that each of us here today can say, ***"You bet, Pastor. I've not only seen the glorious light of Easter; I live in it daily."*** Easter's glorious light lifts us above our daily battles and puts a spring into our step. Easter's glorious light brightens our darkest day and keeps the smile of faith on our lips. Easter's glorious light shines down on our deathbeds and puts a light that cannot be extinguished into our graves. Long after our graves are forgotten and the etching on our gravestones has faded, this Easter light will still be shining. As long as the world stands, people of God like us will find their greatest joy in the risen Savior, who said, ***"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life"*** (Jn 8:12).

We have left the dark tunnel of Lent for the glorious light of Easter. Someday each of us will enter another tunnel, the dark tunnel of death. What comfort to know that at the end of that dark tunnel stands the risen Jesus, the Resurrection and the Life, the One who truly is the Light of the world! What a day that will be when we can join with Mary, Peter & John, and all the other disciples in singing the praises of his wondrous love forever. For Christ has risen! He has risen indeed! Amen.