

Easter Sunday - The Resurrection of Our Lord

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Amazing Grace Lutheran - Pastor Chip Wilke

John 20:1-18

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!" So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen. Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) Then the disciples went back to their homes, but Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" "They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. "Woman," he said, "why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him." Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher). Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her. (NIV)

Have you visited many gravesites? If you've never stood by the side of a grave, more than likely, some day you will. As the familiar saying goes "*the death rate remains constant - one death per person.*" But my question for you on this Easter morning is: what is it like to be there at a gravesite? What are the emotions? What is the atmosphere? If you have been to more than one gravesite you know that it depends, doesn't it? Is the hurt still fresh, or are you visiting the grave of a loved one laid into the ground years ago? Is the deceased young or old; was this someone very close to you or a person you barely knew? Did this person have many friends and family or is the funeral rather small?

Once a man took a tour of the Holy land to visit a couple of gravesites and noticed a real big difference. The first tomb he stopped at was that of King David. The area was crowded with Jewish pilgrims. He was surprised to see that so many were weeping and wailing over what are supposedly the remains of the one they consider the most important king of Israel. The tomb is occupied. But next the group visited the place in Jerusalem that is believed to be the place where Jesus' lifeless body was laid. Of course, this tomb

this tomb is empty. Instead of weeping and wailing, he noticed the Christians gathered around this site were singing joyful hymns of praise. What a difference!

Dear friends, today we, in faith, come to that same empty gravesite. We too gather with joyful hymns of praise and sing our happy Alleluia's. Martin Luther once exclaimed: *"One can never speak of Easter without rising to his feet. The pulpit is never so cramped and crowded as it is on Easter day. Hearing its message and assurances is like Jacob hearing that his son Joseph was still alive. It is almost incredible. It appears too good to be true."* This Easter morning we focus on this incredible good news from God's Word in the Gospel of John that teaches us - **Easter makes for a far different gravesite! It opens our eyes to believe. It wipes away our tears.**

Early on that first Easter morning imagine what walking to the gravesite would have been like for those closest to Jesus. The hurt was still fresh, the pain still intense, the tears still flowing, and the emotions still running high. They were on the way with spices to finish the burial of their Lord's dead body. Ever been to a gravesite like this? Ever been to a gravesite where it seems hope is gone and dreams are shattered? Ever witness an atmosphere where there are only emotions of despair and emptiness?

Today we see how Easter, how the rolled away stone and the empty tomb, changes all this. The other Gospels reveal the presence of more of Jesus' close followers on Easter morning, but our text focuses on three people - Mary Magdalene, Peter, and John, who correctly views himself as the disciple Jesus loved.

Mary Magdalene was one of the first women to arrive at the tomb on Easter morning and she notices *"that the stone had been removed from the entrance. So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"* It appears Mary takes off in a panic leaving the other women behind. She thinks Jesus' enemies are at it again. As if the spitting and mocking and scourging and laughing and crucifying and killing hadn't been enough, Mary now thinks someone took Jesus' dead body. Talk about pouring salt into her already painful wounds!

Peter and John, hearing Mary's message, take off for the gravesite of Jesus as fast as they can. John lets us know that he was a bit faster so He arrives first but doesn't go in, but when bold Peter gets there he goes right into the tomb to investigate. And what does Peter find? *"He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen."* This was no act of grave robbers. If actual grave robbers by some chance had gotten into this sealed and guarded tomb - a tomb the governor of the most powerful nation on earth ordered to make as secure as they know how - these things in the tomb would be gone! It didn't take a private eye or CSI investigation to see that these strips of linens were lying there undisturbed and the face cloth that had covered Jesus' head was folded neatly by the side.

This was the work of a peaceful exit. The cloth was taken off and folded because it was no longer needed. The tomb was empty because Jesus was alive. He had risen just as He said. John eventually came in to see it with his own eyes as well. We read: *"Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed."* The empty tomb opens John's eyes to believe. While John admits he didn't yet understand fully everything about why the Scriptures said Jesus had to rise,

now he believed Jesus was no longer dead. He believed His Savior was alive. Easter opened John's eyes to see a far different gravesite.

What does it take for us to believe? Are we ever slow to trust and quick to doubt like these disciples? Do we want proof we can see and evidence we can examine? Don't we also sin by failing to listen carefully to Jesus' words? Don't we sin when we don't take the time to know and study and understand all of God's precious promises to us? Doesn't the devil often succeed in getting us focus only on what we can see so that we question God's promises of life and forgiveness? John on this Easter evening was with the other disciples when Jesus gave them this gentle rebuke: "***Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.***"

May we be so blessed. May we repent of our sins of doubt and weakness, our sins of not listening to and learning His Word as our top priority, and may we once again turn to Jesus and His empty tomb. For Easter opens our eyes to believe - to believe so many wonderful things. Paul writes in Romans that Jesus was "***declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead.***" If you have any lingering questions about who Jesus is, if you wonder if you can trust what Jesus' Word has to tell you, the empty tomb puts all those questions and doubts to bed! Jesus is who exactly who He claimed to be. Jesus resurrection proves, it powerfully declares Jesus to be the Son of God. So we can trust all His promises. This includes the most important promise there is for you and for me - the promise that Jesus' blood shed on the cross washes all our sins away. The empty tomb means that when Jesus said that our sins are paid for and proclaimed it finished - it truly is finished. God accepted the payment Jesus made for sin on our behalf. The hell we deserve has been suffered. Life and salvation are ours forever. God gives us proof of this by raising Jesus from the dead.

The good news of Easter opens our eyes to believe. Easter did even more for Mary Magdalene. Remember her as the one who just had salt poured into her already painful wounds. She was back at this gravesite once more where we have one of the most touching and heart wrenching accounts in the Bible. Try to picture her grief. The One who meant everything to her was gone, and now all she wanted to do was give Jesus a proper burial. That's all she had left and was the least she could do, and now she can't even have this. Her tears keep coming and everything is still a bit clouded. Two angels in white, asking her the reason for her tears, don't even seem to phase her as she explains how her Lord's body has been taken away. Then turning to the man behind her, which for some reason she mistakes as the gardener, she pleads again for the dead body of her Lord. Can you imagine and picture this kind of grief and pain?

But oh how this all changes at this Easter gravesite! With one word her grief is suddenly lifted and her tears are wiped away. Jesus says: "***Mary,***" and immediately she recognizes that standing next to her is the Lord of life. Her Savior, her Teacher, is alive. He had been raised from the dead just as He said. Now her pain is gone and the dark cloud of sorrow is lifted. Now she didn't have to hold onto Jesus, because although He would be leaving, she would have His promise that He would be with her always. Jesus is alive and will be forever to wipe away her tears. Now she had good news and an exciting message to tell: "***I have seen the Lord!***"

Easter does the same thing for you and me. Jesus wipes our tears away and He does so when we need it the most. Jesus wipes our tears away not with a handkerchief, but with His precious promises. When a loved one is taken from us, Jesus ensures us that

death is but a sleep for His children, so we do not ***“grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.”*** When our tears are falling onto a casket of someone we love but Jesus loved even more, Jesus wraps His arms around us & reminds us: ***“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies” (John 11).*** When we are faced with the harsh reality of our own mortality and know our time is coming when we’ll be placed into a grave, Jesus comes with His reassuring word: ***“Because I live, you also will live.”*** The good news of Easter is ***“Death has been swallowed up in victory”*** - for Jesus - for you & for me!

I don’t know if I can think of anything in this world as sad as a gravesite without Jesus. Have you ever seen one? Such a gravesite is one filled with emotions of despair and emptiness, it is an atmosphere without hope. I pray that we never have to experience such a gravesite with any of our family or friends or loved ones. Because Easter gives us a gravesite that is far different - one where Jesus is there to fill our hearts with faith and wipe away our tears - one in which although we may be sad, we still have reason to sing joyful hymns of praise.

That’s why this good news of victory over death is not something Peter, John or Mary could keep to themselves. It is a victory so great - so life changing that it must be told again and again to all we know. A man named William Sangster was a Christian missionary in the British Isles after World War II. But he ended up with a disease that paralyzed his body, even his vocal chords. The last Easter Sunday he spent on earth, still barely able to move his fingers, he painstakingly took the time to print a short note to his daughter. He wrote: *How terrible to wake up on Easter and have no voice to shout, “He is risen!” But far worse, to have a voice and not want to shout.”* Dear friends may we use our voices and our all to proclaim the good news for: Christ is risen! He has Risen indeed! Amen.

